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THE CANYON KING



OR,

A PRICE ON HIS HEAD.

A Tale of the Wahsatch Range.

BY EDWARD WILLET,

AUTHOR OF "OLD GABE, THE MOUNTAIN TRAMP,"
"FLUSH FRED, THE MISSISSIPPI SPORT,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SAVED AND LOST.

Down the wooded slope of a foothill of the Wahsatch mountains came a solitary man.

Behind him was the sun, just shining above the peaks of the mountain range, and before him in the distance was the placid expanse of the Great Salt Lake, with the houses and temple of the Mormon city beyond it.

The wanderer was a tall and stalwart man of middle age; but his hair was prematurely streaked with gray, and his form was emaciated by exposure and privation.

His external appearance, too, spoke of hard times and rough experiences.

His clothing was in tatters, his hat was sadly dilapidated, and rags were wrapped about his feet, to replace the lost soles of his boots.

"I AM OLD GIDEON GRAY, THE CANYON KING!" HE ANSWERED. "THE MAN WITH A PRICE ON HIS HEAD! DO YOU KNOW ME NOW?"

But he retained a rifle and a revolver in good condition, with a fair supply of ammunition, and he often looked affectionately at the rifle, as if it were the only friend he had left.

"Those infernal red-skins," he said, "nearly made an end of Gid Gray this time; but it served me right for trying to go prospecting in their country. At my time of life I ought to have known better. I would not be a bit surprised to learn that the Saints had put up that job on me, as they are even more opposed to prospecting than the Indians are, fearing that the discovery of mines may bring too many Gentiles among them.

"Well, I am glad that I pulled out of the scrape without being pulled to pieces, though it was the hardest squeeze I ever had in my life. I shall soon see my wife and child again, and that will pay me for all my pains and perils; so here goes for Salt Lake!"

He started forward briskly, as if inspired by a new hope, but had not gone far, scarcely reaching the foot of the hill, when he halted suddenly, and gazed at an object a little distance beyond him.

The object was another wanderer, and a woman at that.

She, too, was evidently tired and footsore, and apparently in great distress.

There was something in the woman's figure or in her gait that must have struck the old prospector as being familiar to him, for he gazed at her intently.

The mere fact of meeting a lone woman in that wilderness was of itself sufficiently surprising.

"Can it be?" he muttered. "It is not possible; but she is so like—"

He hastened forward, and his suspicion soon became conviction.

The woman also recognized him, and tottered toward him.

"My husband!" she cried as she sunk swooning into his arms.

Tears fell down his bronzed cheeks, and upon her pale face, as he laid her on the ground and held her head on his knees.

She soon recovered her senses, and he expressed his joy and surprise at finding her there.

"I thought you were dead," was her feeble reply.

"You came very near thinking the truth, my dear. In the mountains I was attacked and captured by Indians, who kept me a prisoner for a long time, and I was often near death. But I got away from them at last, and was on my way home. What has brought you out here?"

"You know Elder Hynes."

"The beast!" muttered Gray, and his face grew dark.

"After you left Salt Lake he wanted to make me his wife, though he had too many wives already, God knows, and though he knew that I was a married woman.

"He continued to persecute me, and finally informed me that you were dead; that you had been attacked and killed by Indians in the mountains."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Gideon. "I suspected that the Mormons had set those Indians on me, and now I am sure of it. They got the news too straight."

"Then I fell sick," resumed Mary Gray; "but Elder Hynes continued his persecutions, and brought all the pressure of his people to bear upon me. At last I was taken from my room, in spite of my resistance, and was carried to his house, where I was 'sealed' to him according to their horrid custom, then I was locked up; but I resolved to escape at all hazards, and as soon as I gained a little strength I did escape. I fled from Salt Lake, not knowing whither I was going or what was to become of me; but I have found you, my husband, and I am safe."

"I wish to God you were, poor dear. Where is our child?"

"In the care of our neighbor, Mrs. McGovern. She at least is safe."

"I hope so, but I must look after your safety, Mary. I am afraid that Hynes and his tools will pursue you. I am almost sure they will, and I must try to find a place of refuge for you until—My God! there they are!"

This exclamation was forced from the lips of Gid Gray by the appearance of four men who emerged from a clump of trees a little distance down the slope.

Their character and purpose were immediately made known to him and his wife.

"There she is!" cried the leader of the party.

"Who is that man with her?"

"Stand back!" shouted Gray, who had leveled his rifle. "If you come a step further I will fire!"

"It's Gid Gray, as sure as life!" exclaimed one of the four members of the dreaded Danite band.

"Shoot him down, and seize the woman!" ordered the leader.

Gray's rifle cracked instantly, and the speaker fell.

The remaining three hastily fired upon him, but without aim and he was untouched.

Again he fired, bringing down another of his adversaries, and again their answering fire was ineffective.

"No, not ineffective; for he was hit in his most vulnerable part.

A sharp cry from his wife told him that she was struck, and she fell at his side.

With a howl of rage he drew his revolver and rushed upon his surviving foes; but they did not await his coming, throwing away their guns in the panic that struck them, and trusting to their legs to save their lives.

Gid pursued them for a short distance, sending a few shots after them to help their flight, and then returned to where his wife lay motionless on the ground.

The stricken man sunk upon his knee and raised his streaming eyes toward the sky.

"God in heaven," he exclaimed, "avenge me on those murderers, for I cannot avenge myself."

Suddenly he rose to his feet.

"The child!" he muttered. "She at least must be saved. I must hasten to bring her away, and I must reach Salt Lake before those wretches get there. I have not a minute to lose."

He turned to take a last look at the face of his dead wife.

"I must leave you where you are, my murdered one. No time to bury you now. The claims of the living are higher than the claims of the dead."

He ran down the slope, and disappeared in the valley.

That night, but not more than an hour after darkness had set in, the wanderer was prowling about the streets of the city of the Saints.

He moved stealthily but swiftly, pursuing the least frequented ways, as if fearful of being discovered and captured.

As he approached a small wooden house he saw a girl just in her teens standing near the gate.

A cry of joy escaped his lips and attracted his attention.

"Ida!" he exclaimed as he hastened toward her.

She ran to meet him, and the next moment was clasped in his arms.

"Where have you been, papa?" she eagerly demanded, "and where is mamma? They told me that you were dead, and mamma has gone away, and I have nearly cried my eyes out."

"Poor child! Come with me, darling. We must leave this place."

"Are you going to take me to mamma?"

"Yes," he answered, turning away his face.

"Come with me at once!"

"So gladly, papa. Let me go and tell Mrs. McGovern."

"Not a word to anybody! We have not a minute to spare. We must go at once, and must go quietly and secretly. There is great danger for both of us here."

Without another word the girl put her hand in her father's and he led her away, leaving the city as swiftly and stealthily as he had entered it.

Before the moon had gone down behind the western range of mountains the father and the child stood by the body of the mother, which was as yet untouched by beasts or birds.

Tears fell from the eyes of both as Gid Gray told of his desperate encounter with the Danites and the murder of his wife.

Tears flowed yet faster as he accomplished the mournful task of rudely burying his dead with the help of brush and stones.

His face was sad but stern as he took the girl's hand in his and turned away.

"There are hard times before us both now, dear child," said he. "Those scoundrels will hunt me, I know. They will proclaim me an outlaw, and will set a price on my head. But I can hide from them in the hills, and I will keep my pet lamb safe."

He led the girl up the slope, turning but once to shake his clinched hand at the sleeping city, and before daylight they were safe in the most secret recesses of the mountains.

CHAPTER II. THE MIRACLE.

A JULY sun, a brazen sky, a sandy plain, with no vegetation visible, and no water to be seen or smelt.

Two young men in the middle of the plain, mounted on lean, drooping, thirsty horses.

Arizona sun and sky and yellow sand and red cliffs and hopeless drouth.

The plain was about a league in width, and might properly be called a valley, as it was shut in on one side by a bare and precipitous cliff of sandstone, three thousand feet in height or upward, and on the other by a bald, scarped, and seemingly inaccessible ridge.

If that ridge appeared to be impassable, what should be said of the Heaven-reaching cliff at the east?

Simply that it was utterly impossible that any human being could ascend or descend it.

Yet those two men had descended it that morning, and they were not by any means the first who had done so.

They shuddered as they looked back and up at the verge of the cliff, nearly lost in the sky, and followed down with their eyes the narrow and zigzag pathway looking like a dark line on

its face, and thought of what might have been the consequences of a misstep or a slip as they descended.

From that lofty lookout they had seen the sandy plain at the foot of the cliff, then the difficult ridge that bounded it on the west, then another abrupt descent, at the bottom of which, shut in by stupendous walls, foamed and whirled the muddy waters of the Colorado.

It was a frightful journey to reach that wonderful stream; but they had gone for days without water, except such morsels of slime or bits of warm and brackish moisture as they could scoop up from infrequent holes, and they were then willing to risk everything for a sufficient supply for themselves and their suffering horses.

Besides, this was their route; the Colorado was the goal they meant to reach, and nothing could turn them from their purpose.

Two fine-looking young men they were, well-built and sinewy, capable of endurance, full of determination, bronzed, healthy, vigorous and hopeful.

Their garments were of stout and serviceable material, suited to a journey through the wilderness of Arizona, and their rifles were slung at their backs. Their horses, too, were of the best the country afforded, though lean with hunger and worn with travel. Blankets, and sacks of clothing and provisions, equally divided, with tin cups and skillets, made up their outfit.

They were brothers, Frank and Harry Ford by name.

Frank, the elder, was a civil engineer who had been attached to the Government survey in that region. Harry had lately come from "the States" to visit his brother, with the hope of finding adventure and possibly fortune.

Both were fairly embarked on an enterprise upon which they could never have calculated.

From the verge of the cliff the river had been so plainly in sight that the distance had not seemed to be great. The brothers had thought it probable, also, that they would soon find water after making the first descent, as it was to be supposed that the chances for moisture would increase with their proximity to the river.

But they had descended the cliff, and had reached the middle of the plain, without meeting any sign of the precious fluid. Nothing was visible but the sandy, arid waste, and they began to give evidence of suffering under the water famine which they had endured so long.

Their horses, too, showed that they were tortured by thirst. They breathed with difficulty, their tongues lolled out of their mouths, and they sighed audibly as they plodded wearily through the sand.

"I can't stand this much longer," said Harry, upon whose unaccustomed constitution the trials of the journey told more severely than on his brother's hardened frame.

"I am nearly done up, Frank. My horse is almost ready to drop, and my mouth is so dry that I can scarcely move my tongue."

"Better keep it still, then," observed Frank.

"You have got to stand it, Harry, whether you can or not. I hope we may find water at the foot of the ridge yonder. I am sure that there has been running water there at no distant day, and we may find a little left in holes. Bear up a while, my boy."

This was poor consolation to Harry; but he did bear up bravely, and he kept silent as the horses worked their weary way through the sand until they reached the broken, precipitous and forbidding ridge, at the foot of which they had hoped to find water.

No water there.

It needed but a glance to convey that sad truth to their minds.

It was evident that the bed of a former stream was there; but it was as dry as any other portion of the plain, and Harry Ford looked despairingly at his brother, but without uttering another word of complaint.

"I don't give it up yet," said Frank, speaking firmly enough as he pointed to a few sickly blades of grass that had struggled up through the sand.

"Not yet, my boy. There is moisture here, and the water can't be very far below the surface."

"But how are we to get at it?" demanded Harry.

"Watch me, and you will learn something."

Frank Ford dismounted, untied a small bundle of reeds that had been fastened to his saddle, selected one of the longest, and blew through it.

"What are you going to do now?" inquired Harry.

"I am going to try an experiment—something that I was reading of in a book of African travel a while ago. It may not amount to anything; but it is worth trying."

"You seem to be fixed for it."

"Yes; I cut these reeds at a swamp in the lower country, before we started on this journey, thinking that I would find a use for them some time."

With his knife and a tin cup Frank began to dig a hole in the sand.

"It is moist and cool," he said, as he thrust in his hand and drew out the sand.

When he had got down as far as his arm would reach, it could be seen that the sand which he threw out was damp and dark, and the horses smelled at it eagerly, laying their parched tongues upon it.

But the hole did not fill with water.

The worker waited a few minutes; but none of the precious fluid came trickling into it.

"We are wasting time here," said Harry. "It don't seem to be possible for me to go on; but we must try to reach the river."

"Wait a little, my boy. I haven't tried my experiment yet."

"What in the name of wonder can you do?"

"Wait and see."

In Frank Ford's outfit was a gunny bag of coarse and fibrous material. He cut off a portion of this, and pulled the strands apart, until he had a mass of fibers in his hand.

This mass he wrapped loosely about the end of the reed, and stuffed it down into the hole he had dug.

Then he filled up the hole with the damp sand, packing it lightly, until nothing but the end of the reed was visible, sticking up out of the ground.

Harry watched him, interested in the proceedings, but quite doubtful of the result.

Kneeling down, Frank applied his mouth to the reed, and sucked vigorously.

In a few moments he stopped up the end of the reed with his thumb, and joyfully looked at his brother.

"Come and get some," said he.

"Some what?" demanded the incredulous Harry.

"Some water!"

"Do you really mean to tell me that you have got water there?"

"Come and taste it."

Harry quickly dismounted, and eagerly applied his mouth to the reed, under the instructions of his brother.

An expression of happiness stole over his features as the cool and refreshing liquid flowed into his mouth and gurgled down his throat.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD FERRYMAN'S REVELATION.

WHEN Harry Ford had partially satisfied his consuming thirst, he resigned his place to his brother, who proceeded to show his power of suction.

The horses, which had smelt the water, moaned and begged for some, almost like human creatures.

When Frank had satisfied himself Harry took another turn at the suction, but soon abandoned it.

"How bitter it is!" he exclaimed as he stopped up the reed again.

"If you have just found that out," observed Frank, "it shows that you have had enough. You were too thirsty to notice anything bitter about it when you first tasted the water. Now we will see what we can do for the horses."

It was no easy matter to supply the needs of the suffering quadrupeds; but something was done to relieve them.

While Harry held the tin cup Frank sucked up water through the reed, filling the cup twice for each of the poor beasts before the supply at the bottom was exhausted.

"I don't quite understand the working of that pump yet," remarked Harry.

"It is very simple," answered Frank. "We exhaust the air in the reed by suction, and the moisture that is scattered through the sand rushes in and is collected by the fibers of the gunny cloth. Then it follows the vacuum up into the reed, and we get the water."

"Science is a great scheme. Come on, Frank. We will all last now until we reach the river."

The ascent of the ridge was very difficult; but the brothers accomplished it by hard labor, helping their horses up the worst places, and then found themselves on the verge of another cliff, similar to that which they had left in their rear in the morning.

This cliff presented a sheer descent of at least three thousand feet; but there was a pathway, such as it was.

"We might as well jump over at once and end this sort of thing," despairingly murmured Harry as he looked downward.

"We ought not to be worried by a little thing like this," replied Frank. "I have seen worse, and I am sure that where other men and horses have gone we and our horses can go."

"Lead the way, then, so that I can have you to fall on when I drop."

Down the thread-like, zigzag, perilous pathway they went, their horses leading the way, and it was nearly dark at the bottom of that tremendous ravine when they reached the base of the cliff.

They paused there a few moments, to look back at the dizzy path they had trod, and to wonder at the lofty walls of sandstone that shut them in.

Then they pushed on to the river, which was but a little distance from the foot of the cliff.

At the river they found water that was indeed water, and both men and beasts hastened to satisfy their thirst.

When all had drank their fill, they looked

across the turbid reach of whirling water, and could dimly descry the shape of a small house in the shadow of the bluff on the other side.

"We have done well," declared Frank Ford. "We struck the river at exactly the right place. Now, if old Nathan is at home, and if I can make him hear, we may hope to get across soon."

He put his hands to his mouth, and raised a long and loud halloo, which woke the echoes of the canyon for a considerable distance up and down the river.

There was no reply, and he called again and again, and again.

At last a faint cry came from the other side, and he answered it.

"That is all we can do just now," he said.

"They have heard us, and the old man will probably come to us if he is about. But it will take time. This river runs like a mill-race, Harry, and it is no easy matter to cross it. Nathan Sollis will be obliged to take his boat some distance up-stream, for fear that the current might carry it into the rapids. Sit down, my boy, and be as contented as you can. We shall soon see her."

The brothers seated themselves on the rocks, and gazed at the dark and turbid stream and the lofty overhanging cliffs.

"I am afraid we are on a wild-goose chase," observed Harry. "Are you sure, Frank, that this girl is Clara Carron?"

"Quite sure of it, and sure that she is the same Clara Carron whom we knew in Ohio."

"Mat Carron's daughter?"

"Yes. Her father left Akron shortly after I came away, and while you were at college. He came to New Mexico, and his wife died at Santa Fe. Then he made his way up through the country to Salt Lake with his daughter. There he joined the Mormons, and became a leader in what is called the Danite Band. This much I know from reliable sources; but it was only lately that I heard of Clara's troubles."

"I should have thought that you, who were so deeply interested in the girl, would have gone up into Mormondom to see her."

"I meant to do so, as soon as I heard that she was in trouble. I thought then that I ought to go, as I feared that she might be in trouble. You know what wild and unscrupulous man Mat Carron always was. If he thought he could advance himself in the world by selling Clara to the devil, I verily believe he would strike the bargain."

"That is about his style," remarked Harry.

"But I could not go when I wanted to, as I was bound in honor as well as in law to the chief of the survey for a certain time, and then I heard of her through one of our men who had crossed the Colorado at this place."

"That was a stroke of luck for you, Frank."

"I was glad to hear from her, though the news was not good news. Our man said that there was a beautiful white girl at Nathan Sollis's, whose name was Clara Carron, and who was in trouble. He did not know what was the matter with her, but judged that she had fled from the Mormons. I could easily guess what was the matter, provided that she was our Clara Carson, and there could be no doubt of that."

"I suppose not. It is an unusual name."

"Quite unusual. It is not at all likely that there are two Clara Carrons in this part of the country. When I received the news I was expecting you every day, and you know that I haven't lost an hour's time since you arrived."

"Indeed you have not, Frank. I found an adventure ready for me as soon as I struck you. What will you do with her when you find her?"

"What will I do? That will depend entirely upon what she needs or what she wants. I only know that she can depend upon me in any extremity, and that I would lay down my life for her if she needed that sacrifice. I mean to serve her to the best of my ability, and shall expect you to help me."

"You may bet on me, old fellow, though I don't happen to be in love with her. What's that, Frank? I thought I heard oars up yonder."

Both listened, and soon they distinctly heard through the darkness the sound of oars and the grating of a boat on the rock.

Then came a hail from a little distance up the river.

"Who's thar? Air ye white?"

A satisfactory answer was given, and a skiff soon dropped down with the current and landed near them.

A man in the skiff arose and looked at them closely.

"Is that you, Cap'n Ford?" he demanded.

"Glad to know that you remember me, Mr. Sollis," answered Frank. "This is my brother, and we want to cross. Will you take us over?"

"Yaas; but you'll hev to leave the hosses hyar, and I'll send 'em over some fodder."

"All right. I want to ask you, Mr. Sollis, about a young lady named Clara Carron."

"Cre-ation!" exclaimed the old man.

"What do you mean? I heard that she was at your place, and I think I am acquainted with her."

"Cre-ation! Hyar's another of 'em, axin' arter leetle Clara. Why, man alive, she's gone!"

CHAPTER IV.

A LAWYER'S LITTLE GAME.

SEÑOR FRANCISCO DE LERDO, *a su servicio de ustedes, señores y señoritas.*

A scion of one of the families of California, of a family which boasted that the blue blood in its veins was the unadulterated article from the fount of Old Castile, of a family which had once been wealthy and had always been proud.

The branch of the family which terminated in Francisco had been stripped of its foliage of wealth, while it retained its inheritance of pride.

His father had been a spendthrift, who had brought up his son in idleness and with extravagant ideas. The consequence was that the young Californian had been left at his father's death with nothing but his wits to live upon.

He had contrived, however, to make his wits serviceable to him after a fashion. Being an adept in cards and billiards, the discovery of gold and the settlement of the country had opened to him a field which he had not failed to work.

His qualities were such as enabled him to extract money from the pockets of others without much labor or risk on his own part, and he would thus have been able to subsist comfortably, if it had not been for his extravagant habits and for the fact that he was as ready to lose money at faro and monte as to win it at those games of which he was master.

It was between a feast and a famine with him, therefore, and he was always either at the extreme of luxury and triumph, or in the depths of poverty and despair.

There was a branch of the family from which Francisco had had expectations.

The sole representative of that branch was his father's brother, Antonio de Lerdo, who had not only saved his patrimony, but had largely increased it by dealing in hides and cattle.

Though this mercantile De Lerdo disliked his extravagant nephew, Francisco was not without hopes of becoming his heir, until the old man suddenly married the widow of a Yankee sea-captain, named Hannah Carver, *nee* Russell.

Soon after his marriage he died, leaving the greater portion of his wealth to his widow, and Francisco felt that his expectations were at an end in that quarter.

Consequently his disappointment was not great when he learned, at the death of his uncle's widow, that she had bequeathed her fortune to some far-away relations of her own.

He felt, however, that he had been shamefully treated, and his indignation vented itself in a battle royal with the tiger on Kearney street, in which the tiger, as usual, got the best of it, and Francisco de Lerdo retired from the contest with empty pockets and disconsolate demeanor.

Returning to his lodgings, and wondering where and how he should next replenish his purse, he found his room occupied by a gentleman whom he would not have expected to see there.

This was no less a personage than Emilio Tessier, who had been the legal adviser of Antonio de Lerdo, and was the executor of his widow's will.

With this gentleman Francisco had always been on good terms, and his presence at that place, the young man hoped, might be regarded as a good omen.

He therefore welcomed the lawyer warmly, and offered such hospitality as his abode afforded.

"I drink to your health and prosperity," said Tessier, as he tossed off a glass of wine.

"There is nothing the matter with my health," sadly answered Francisco; "but as for prosperity—*vaya!*"

"It may come, my boy. I have always been your well-wisher, and am none the less so now. How are you off for money?"

Francisco turned his pockets inside out.

"Money? I can't find a coin. I hope you have not come to me for money."

"By no means. I supposed that you were poor enough, and I have come to advise you, to assist you, to tell you how you may get money."

"That is quite another thing. You could not have come to a place where your advice would be more acceptable, and I hope you will give it to me without any delay."

"Be patient, my friend, and I think you will admit that my advice is worth having. As you already know it has been my opinion that you were unjustly treated by your deceased uncle and his widow."

"More than unjustly, my dear Tessier. I was shamefully ill-treated."

"I have thought of the matter a great deal, and am inclined to believe that you will be able to recover not a part only, but the whole of the property that should have been yours."

"How is that?" demanded Francisco. "Can the will be broken? You told me that it could not. What has changed your mind on that point?"

"I have not changed my mind. The will is impregnable. But there is something that you can do for yourself."

"What is it?"

"Do you know to whom your uncle's widow left the property?"

"To some Yankee, I believe. What need I care for the name? To some person with whom I have nothing to do, and in whom I can take no interest."

"It is a woman, Francisco."

"All the worse for that. When women get hold of money, there is no hope that they will ever let go."

"She is a young woman," observed the lawyer.

"Well?"

"And beautiful."

"Oho!"

"And unmarried."

"Aha!"

"You catch my meaning, then?"

"I believe I do, my dear Tessier."

"Why should you not marry this woman who is young and beautiful and unmarried and rich, and thus gain possession of the property which should have been yours, with a pretty wife to boot?"

"Why not?" eagerly answered the young man. "Consider it done. But who is this young and beautiful woman who is unmarried and rich, and where shall I find her?"

"Her name is Clara Carron, and she is the child of the sister of your uncle's widow—in other words, the niece of Senora de Lerdo."

"A sort of a cousin of mine, then."

"You may call her so, if you choose. As executor of the will it is my duty to find this heiress, and some memoranda were put in my possession to assist me in the search. From the memoranda I learned that she lived in Ohio, or had lived there."

"Ohio!" exclaimed Francisco. "Where is Ohio? I have heard of a river of that name? Is it in New York?"

"Is that all you know about geography? Ohio is a great State, half as large as California."

"Very well. What should I know of those Yankees and their barbarous country? I have learned too much about them since they have overrun California. Do you expect me to go to Ohio?"

"Not so far as that. She is not living in Ohio now. But you must let me tell the story in my own way. She had been living in Ohio, at a town named Akron, and to Akron I wrote. She was well known there, and was described as a beautiful and amiable young lady."

"How old?" demanded Francisco.

"As near as I can judge, she must now be about twenty."

"So old? Horrors!"

"You forget, my boy, that those American girls of the North are mere children at twenty."

"So let it be. What has become of this mere child who is so beautiful and amiable?"

"She had left Akron some time before my informant wrote, with her mother and father, and had gone to New Mexico. There the mother died, and she accompanied her father to Utah, where the paternal Carron joined the Mormons."

"Cospita! I have heard of those people. She must have been married or martyred before this."

"Let us hope not. But you should seek her, Francisco, without any loss of time."

"Have you not written to her, then, in Utah?"

"No, indeed. I have kept the affair to myself. When I learned that she was young and handsome and unmarried, I declared that there was a chance for my friend, Francisco, and I have come to offer it to you."

"But in what shape?"

"As executor of the will I make you my agent to search for her, and you shall go and find her."

"To break the joyful news to her that she is an heiress, and that I am her poverty stricken cousin?"

"That is not exactly the style in which I would advise you to attend to the business," answered the lawyer. "Why should you be in a hurry to inform her of her good fortune?"

"What else should I do?"

"Why should you not play the part of a rich gentleman who falls in love with a poor girl and marries her? After the marriage you will have time enough to tell her the good news you know. Too much happiness at once might injure her health."

"True enough. The news will keep until she is my wife, provided that she will marry me. All depends on that."

"And that depends on yourself. I see nothing to hinder you. How old are you, Francisco?"

"Over thirty."

"You are still young. And you are handsome."

"So I have been told."

"A very fine-looking young gentleman. With the grace of a native Californian and the manners of a prince."

"I at least have a princely way of getting rid of money."

"You are noted for your conquests among the fair sex. Besides, you have the noble air and the Andalusian style with which those blonde

Americans are so easily infatuated. You have only to lay siege to her in earnest, and she is sure to surrender."

"You give me hope, my dear *avocado*. Already I have her in my arms and her fortune in my pockets. But that reminds me that I am now penniless, and I will need money to carry on the campaign."

"Of course you will, and that is arranged."

"But how?"

"I tell you that I make you my agent to find the heiress, and your expenses will be paid out of the estate. But they must be reasonable, my dear Francisco, and you must not waste the money in gambling."

"It is not likely that I will have a chance."

"When you have found her, everything will depend on your address and discretion."

"Those qualities may be relied on, my dear friend, and it will be strange if I do not secure her, provided that I find her unmarried. I will at once make preparations, and will set out for Salt Lake with as little delay as possible."

CHAPTER V.

A THIRD PARTY IN THE HUNT.

CORTEZ CASTARRA, better known as "The Whip," was the pride of the Mexican border from El Paso to Sonora.

He was one of the few Mexicans who were not terrified at the very name of Apaches, who were not afraid to meet those savage marauders on equal terms.

When the red outlaws swooped down upon the plains of Chihuahua or Sonora, Cortez Castarra was there to meet them, to drive them back if that were possible, or to harass their flanks and rear when they returned to their own country with their plunder.

When they lurked among the mountain fastnesses of the Pinaleno or Mogollon savages, or dried their meat near the head-waters of the Gila or the Little Colorado, he was there, too, stealing in among them to strike unexpectedly and deadly blows, and darting away before they could rally to take vengeance upon the daring intruder.

Castarra had personal injuries to avenge upon the Apaches, as well as the insults and outrages under which his people suffered, and he had devoted his life to the task of exterminating the savages.

He had collected a small but warlike band, very few of whom were of Mexican nationality, and had caused his name to be dreaded by the Apaches, as much as it was beloved by the Mexicans of the border.

It was true that the Mexican *valientes*, who occasionally marched northward to repel the Indian invaders, and usually marched back without meeting them, were accustomed to take to themselves the credit of the blows that were struck by Castarra and his free lances; but he cared nothing for that, as he was not fighting for fame, and was sure that his brave deeds were known where he wished them to be remembered.

He had made his reputation in a few years, as he was not yet thirty.

On all sides he was admitted to be one of the handsomest fellows the sun shone on, with hair and eyes of the deepest black, complexion dark but rich, and the dress and manners of a Mexican *caballero*.

From Durango to Santa Fe he was famed for valor and gallantry, prominent at all fandangos and fiestas, the envy of the young men and the admiration of the ladies.

Great was the wonder among the Mexican population of El Paso when Cortez Castarra turned his steps northward, accompanied only by his faithful henchman, Pedrillo Mocco.

Great was the wonder at the little towns on the route from El Paso to Santa Fe, as he silently passed through them without explaining his errand.

No less astonished were the people of Santa Fe when, after a brief stay in that ancient city, he struck off toward the west, without confiding his business or his destination to any one.

Secret as he was concerning the object of his journey, it was not concealed from his companion, who had proved his faithfulness and devotion on many occasions, and in whom Castarra placed the most implicit confidence.

Pedrillo Mocco was a Mexican of middle age, short, broad and squat, with low forehead, square face, and an immense breadth of chest.

Though there could be no doubt of his strength, his activity might reasonably be questioned; yet he had shown, when occasion required, the agility of a monkey and the suppleness of a serpent.

His most salient trait of character was his attachment to his master, as he called Castarra, and his readiness to follow him into any danger and obey instantly his slightest command.

On this occasion, however, Pedrillo had felt it to be his duty to dissuade his leader from the enterprise he had undertaken, and he renewed his entreaties when they were crossing the valley of the Rio Grande.

"There is yet time to turn back, master," he said. "Why should we waste our time and risk our lives in such a wild-goose chase as this?"

"What!" exclaimed Cortez. "Do you dare to compare the peerless Clara to a wild goose? Perish the word!"

"It is dead, *excellenza*, and I would never have thought of applying it to the peerless Clara or any other lady. Let her be a swan, or a nightingale, or any bird you please. It is just as hard to hunt her."

"But when we find her, Pedrillo; that will worth all the time and trouble and labor."

"And what then? Perhaps she is married, or she may not be willing to listen to your love."

"Can I doubt it? Is there a maiden, from Durango to Santa Fe, from the Rio Bravo to the Californian Gulf, who would not be proudly pleased if Cortez Castarra should whisper words of love in her ear? Is it possible that this northern beauty is so much colder than our Mexican maids?"

"They are different," insisted Pedrillo.

"Women are women, all the world over. Besides, Pedrillo, I have good reason to hope. When her father came to Santa Fe, with herself and her mother—ah! there was a woman! I never saw such a beautiful matron. Such a clear and transparent complexion! Such eyes of heavenly blue! Such soft, brown hair, with gold dust sifted through it! Such an expression of the most exalted amiability! It was no wonder that the angels called her home."

"You are poetical, senior. Was it the mother with whom you were in love, or the daughter?"

"The daughter, my friend, is an exact counterpart of the mother. I was about to say that when the mother had sickened and died, and was still so beautiful in death, the fair Clara smiled upon me again and again."

"It is no wonder, senior, as you were so kind to her."

"Who could help being kind to such an angelic creature? I did not tell her of my love—it was too sacred a thing for that; but my eyes at least showed the sympathy I felt for her. If I can read a woman's face, and I think I can, she repaid my sympathy with more than gratitude."

"Let us take it for granted, senior, that she loves you, or will accept your love when you offer it to her. What reason have you to hope that you will find her?"

"I have told you that her father took her to Salt Lake, and that I had intended to go there to seek her; but the Indian troubles prevented me."

"That is a long way," observed Pedro.

"Not so very long for us. I have since learned that she has fled from Salt Lake, and has gone southward."

"How news does travel, to be sure!"

"The birds of the air bring news to me, as you well know, and they were bound to tell me of Clara. I can imagine why she left the Mormon city, and I am sure that she is in trouble, that she needs help and protection. I may save her life, or may rescue her from some great calamity, and then, Pedrillo, do you think she can refuse my love?"

"I should hope not. But it seems to me that you ought to have taken a larger escort. As you set forth with only poor Pedrillo to accompany you, I am reminded of a knight of whom I have read in a Spanish romance, who went in quest of adventures with only one squire to attend him. I suppose the story has been brought to my mind because the description of the squire fits me so exactly."

"You are speaking of the Knight of La Mancha, Pedrillo. You may liken yourself to Sancho Panza if you choose; but I am no Don Quixote. My enemies are always flesh and blood, and I shall never fight wind-mills."

"Nevertheless, senior," persisted Pedrillo, "it seems to me that we are in pursuit of a cloud, a vapor, a will-o'-wisp, a phantom, and that we will be soon treading on dangerous ground."

"Vaya! where is the danger? There are no enemies on the route—nothing but peaceful Moquis and friendly Navajoes. Besides, have we not met danger together before now? If you make any more objections, my friend, I shall believe that you are getting old and silly."

"I will say nothing more about the matter, senior, but will leave everything to your skill and discretion."

Pedrillo kept his word, and was silent thereafter concerning his leader's object.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAIL OF RED SLEEVE.

AT the end of their sixth day's journey from Santa Fe, Cortez Castarra and his companion halted in a deep and dark canyon, whose walls of sandstone rose up to a towering height, nearly shutting out the light of day.

Although no danger was to be apprehended in that region, they did not neglect their customary precautions, but turned aside into a branch of the canyon, or a break in the geologic formation, where they camped for the night at a little distance from the main canyon.

They did not build a fire, as it was not necessary to cook their provisions, but spread their blankets on the dry sand, and the leader took his turn at sleeping, while his comrade kept watch.

Castarra had slept but a short time when Pe-

drillo stole softly to his side, and aroused him by placing a hand on his shoulder.

Cortez was instantly awake and on his feet.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Listen, and you will know."

From the main canyon came some faint sounds that caused the Mexican to start. He dropped down, and held his ear to the ground, so that he could hear them more distinctly.

Pedrillo had also laid his ear to the ground, and was listening intently.

"What is it?" again asked the leader.

"Indians."

"Exactly, and there is a large body of them."

"Who can they be?"

"That is what we are going to find out. Follow me, my friend, and we will soon place ourselves where we can both see and hear them."

Castarra took the lead, and the two Mexicans silently walked down the branch to its junction with the main canyon.

At this point there was a tall pinnacle of rock, near the wall of the canyon, but separated from it by an interval of a few feet at the base.

At a greater height the divergence was considerable, as the rocky wall fell back, and the pinnacle inclined in the opposite direction, shooting upward like a leaning tower.

Behind this singular formation Castarra and his comrade ensconced themselves, and it was none too soon that they gained their place of concealment, as the trampling of the horses and the voices of the men became more audible, and in a few moments the dark forms of a party of horsemen came into view, slowly moving down the canyon.

The party numbered at least thirty men, and they were undoubtedly Indians, fully armed and in their war-paint.

They passed so close to the concealed Mexicans that the lineaments of their fierce countenances could plainly be seen in the moonlight, and their harsh gutturals could be heard as they spoke to each other.

In a few moments they had gone below the pinnacle of rock, and the scouts ventured out from their concealment and looked after them.

"Apaches!" muttered Pedrillo, concentrating in that subdued utterance a vast amount of hatred of his ancient enemies.

"Yes, they are Apaches," said Castarra. "That was Red Sleeve at the head of the band."

"And that was Picoto who rode next to him. The dog! It is not long since he had nearly taken my scalp, and he has yet to suffer for that. But what can a war-party of Apaches, with Red Sleeve at their head, be doing here at this time? Are they not at peace with the Navajoes?"

"Is an Apache ever at peace? They have promised to keep the peace; but who believes the word of an Apache? He will keep his promise as long as it is for his interest to do so, and not a moment longer."

"Just like civilized nations," observed Pedrillo.

"Not much worse, I admit. It is certain that this party means mischief, and I must know what manner of mischief it is. Did you understand anything of what they said, Pedrillo?"

"A few words. I know but little of their language. I heard nothing of their intentions, except that they meant to go into camp a little further down the canyon."

"We need not trouble ourselves about them, until morning. Let us sleep, Pedrillo."

Before dawn the Mexicans were astir, and they moved carefully down the canyon until they reached the camp of the Apaches, which they found deserted.

They took up the trail, and followed it as it led them by a steep and rocky pathway out of the canyon upon the desert table-land.

Then they halted to reconnoiter, and soon caught sight of the Apaches as they were disappearing in the distance beyond a row of sand-hills.

As soon as the Indians had passed out of view, the scouts rode forward until they reached the sand-hills, one of which they climbed, leaving their horses below, and again examined the landscape to discover the party they were following.

The table-land on which the sand-hills were situated shelved down, by a series of gigantic steps at wide distances apart, toward the San Juan and the Colorado, the plateaus being broken here and there by deep canyons, through which, in the rainy season, flowed tributaries of the former river.

On the edge of one of these steps—that is to say, on the verge of a stupendous cliff, the Indians had halted, and were evidently surveying the scene below them.

After awhile they rode a short distance along the verge of the cliff, and then appeared to descend by some precipitous pathway.

The Mexicans again rode forward, and did not slacken their speed until they also reached the edge of the step, where they halted and looked down.

No Apaches were in sight.

As there had been time for them to descend the cliff, Castarra concluded that they were in concealment somewhere below.

This conclusion was rendered the more probable by the fact that a small party could be seen crossing the plain below and approaching the cliff.

The party appeared to be composed of white people, and among them was a woman.

When Castarra perceived the woman in the party, he became strangely excited, and seized the arm of his comrade with such a grip that Pedrillo could not help wincing.

"What is the matter?" demanded the henchman.

"Pedrillo, there is that in the air which tells me something. Surely the saints have guided me to this place. Do you see the woman who is coming across the plains below there?"

"Yes, I see a woman."

"As I hope to be saved, my friend, I believe it is Clara Carron, the lady whom I am seeking."

"You are dreaming, senior. You talk wildly. You can scarcely even be sure at this distance that it is a woman."

"Love sees with better eyes than those of flesh, Pedrillo, and there is something in the air which tells me that it is she."

"And those Apaches, senior?"

"Those Apaches are lying in wait for the party."

CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE NORTH.

THOUGH Nathan Sollis would not have been willing to admit the impeachment, it was a fact that his wife had persuaded him to leave Mormonism.

The wife who is here spoken of was his real wife, his first wife, the "old woman" whom he had long since vowed to love and cherish, and who had been true and faithful to him during so many years.

When, in obedience to the commands of the elders of what he then believed to be the true church, he had suffered two other women to be "sealed" to him, he felt that he had taken a wrong step, and it was not long before he repented it most bitterly.

Sarah never upbraided him, never complained; but her look of agony, her evident sinking under a burden that was too heavy for her, did not fail to have an effect upon Nathan, who was a thoroughly conscientious man, and knew that he had wronged his wife.

He perceived that there was a conflict between his conscience and his church, and did not know how to reconcile it.

He pondered the matter and prayed over it, but could come to no conclusion, except that both he and Sarah were miserable.

At last he went to her for help, and he got it.

In a shamefaced but perfectly sincere manner he told her something of his perplexity, and asked her why she had lately been so low in spirits.

She told him the truth in a few plain words, and with no tears.

He muttered something about the commands of the Lord.

"Nathan," said she, "can you believe that the Lord would ever command you to break my heart?"

"No, indeed," he answered, "and it shall not be broken by any act of mine. I see my way clearly now, Sarah, and with God's help I will follow it."

He did as his conscience told him to do, informing the women who had been "sealed" to him that he intended to cleave to his first wife, and to her only, and offering them a fair share of his substance, but no share of himself.

His offer was accepted by one of them, whom he settled on a ranch in the southern part of the Territory, and the other went back to the "world's people."

Nathan then established himself, with his wife and children, at the crossing of the Colorado, where Frank and Harry Ford found him.

He still claimed to be a Mormon, though his faith had received a severe shock, and he had not put himself out of the influences of his church, as there were Mormon settlements above and below him.

"He had 'accepted a mission,' as he said; but his mission seemed to consist in keeping himself and his family at a distance from other Mormons."

Nathan Sollis had met many strange characters, white and red and mixed, since he established himself on the Colorado; but he was never so much astonished as when a beautiful white girl came riding down the gorge that led to his habitation, accompanied by a young man, or boy, of nineteen or thereabout.

The girl was simply the loveliest creature that Nathan Sollis had ever seen.

Her clear complexion, her blue eyes, her light brown hair and her perfect form, were a wonder in that part of the world.

She was neatly dressed, too, and was mounted on a fine horse.

Her companion was an overgrown scrub of a boy, irredeemably homely in his features, and loutish in his appearance and manners; but there was an intelligent twinkle in his eyes for all that.

He rode a powerful male, and carried a long

rifle, the rusty barrel of which seemed ready to part from the company of its worm-eaten stock.

Nathan Sollis recognized the boy as Jotham Root, a youth whom he had seen in the neighborhood of Salt Lake, and Jotham introduced the young lady as Miss Clara Carron.

Sarah Sollis, who was again bright and cheerful and happy, warmed toward Clara at once, and hastened to make her comfortable, and give her rest from her long ride.

The old man was also interested in her, but could not be satisfied until he should learn who she was, and why she had come to that out-of-the-way place in such an unusual style.

He asked Jotham Root about her; but the lad declined to give any information.

"She kin tell the story when she gits ready," he said. "'Tain't fur me to do. But she's all right, you kin bet your sweet life."

The old man was not long compelled to remain in ignorance, as his wife had her share of curiosity, and she had not been many hours in the company of Clara before the girl confided in her fully.

She had come from Salt Lake. Her mother was dead, her father had joined the Mormons, and she had no other relations or friends in those parts.

She had not long been in Salt Lake, when the purpose was developed of making her the fourth or fifth wife of a prominent Mormon, and the project was favored by her father, who was anxious to secure the favor of the Mormon authorities.

Clara protested earnestly against this plan, but discovered that it would be necessary to do something more than protest, as it was the intention that she should be "sealed" whether she consented or not.

She determined to fly, but did not know how to get away, or in what direction to go.

In her extremity, she found a friend in Jotham Root, who offered not only to assist her to escape, but to accompany and guide her.

Clara gladly accepted his offer, and they fled from Salt Lake together.

They had made their way through the Territory without difficulty, as she had brought away some money, and Jotham had some that he had saved from his earnings, and they had got thus far on their journey toward Santa Fe, where Clara hoped to find some friends who would assist her.

This was just the story to gain the sympathy of Mrs. Sollis, who comforted the poor girl, and bestowed upon her an abundance of motherly counsel and encouragement.

Nathan was also satisfied, as his Mormonism was not strong enough then to prevent him from aiding a refugee from polygamy.

He insisted, however, that Clara should remain at his house until she should be fully rested, and until he could find some more suitable escort than Jotham for the journey she desired to make.

He again questioned Jotham, who was willing to open his lips since Clara had told her story, and learned from him many particulars, which caused him not only to congratulate the girl upon her fortunate escape, but to praise the courage and shrewdness of the lad who had extricated her from her peril.

"Do you mean to say, boy," demanded the old man, "that you dar'd to kerry that gal out of a Mormon city, and through a Mormon kentry, all alone by yourself?"

"I jest did," answered Jotham, "and jumped at the chaine. Reckon you'd be glad to do as much fur sich a gal as that, old as you air. Clara's an old pard o' mine, too. I knowed her and all her folks up in Ohio. Didn't her ma use to give me lots o' mince pies and crullers? Oh! she was a jolly good 'un."

"Didn't you hev the fear of Elder Hynes afore your eyes? He would make mince-pie of you, young man, if he should ketch you."

"Fust ketch, then chaw, is a rule that's allers bound to work. Old Hynes or any of his gang would git a taste of old Rattler here, afore they could come nigh me."

"Is that gun what you call old Rattler? Reckon it can't do much but rattle. Do you mean to tell me that the thing will shoot?"

"Shute?" exclaimed the boy. "Wish I had as many dollars as I know she'll shute. I'd jest like to see the livin' thing on this airth that she won't shute when I give her the chaine. Shute? Don't talk!"

"How do you expect to git paid for your trouble and risk?"

"Paid? Bless your old eyes! One word or look from Miss Clara would hire me to do sich work fur a year. Paid? Don't talk!"

The old man did not talk any more upon that subject.

He was convinced of Jotham's devotion to the young lady, and set his mind at work to provide for her comfort and safety.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCOVERED BY A COUSIN.

So Clara Carron was domiciled at the Sollis ranch, and immediately she began to study how she could make herself useful and agreeable during her stay.

She soon proved to be so handy and obliging that Mrs. Sollis declared that she did not see how she should ever get along without her, and she became the joy and delight of the household.

Jotham Root also made himself useful, helping Nathan Sollis on the ranch and at all his work.

The lad speedily convinced the old man that he was something better than the ignorant and awkward lout he had at first appeared to be.

But he did not neglect the duty which he had gladly assumed of watching over Clara's safety.

It was possible that she might have been pursued. It was also possible that she might be recognized by some transient visitor, who would carry the news to Salt Lake.

So Jotham kept watch as well as he could on the gorge that led down to the ranch, determined to take her, as soon as danger should threaten her, to a place of concealment that he knew of.

Danger arrived; but it did not take the shape that he had been looking for.

One day there came down to the river a party of three men, who were strangers to Jotham, as well as to Nathan Sollis.

The leader of the party was a young man who had the appearance of having been brought up in a city, although he was somewhat bronzed by exposure to the sun and wind of the plains.

He was not handsome, on the contrary, there was something in his countenance that might prejudice a close observer against him; but he had bright eyes, with an independent and familiar way that might easily be mistaken for frankness and good-humor.

His companions were rough-looking men, such as were known in the mining districts as hard cases; but they were quiet and docile enough at that time and place, and it was evident that they were the hired guides and escort of their leader.

The young man's explanation of his arrival was that he merely wished to get a night's rest and provisions for his party, with fodder for their horses.

Nathan Sollis, who was accustomed to entertain such travelers as came that way, readily agreed to accommodate them.

The two men who composed the escort were given shelter in a shed, and their leader was introduced into the house.

He at once made himself at home there, speaking familiarly to Nathan Sollis and his wife, and retailing the news from "the States" and other quarters with great glibness of tongue and a remarkable flow of language.

Speedily he gained the favor of the family, in spite of the scowls of Jotham Root, who had taken a dislike to him from the first.

When Clara made her appearance, the stranger did not attempt to conceal his admiration; but it was expressed by such respectful language and looks that no fault could be found with him.

"Really, Mrs. Sollis," he said, "I would not have thought it possible to find so fair a flower among the rocks and barrens here."

"She is a beauty, fur a fact," observed Nathan, while Clara blushed at these compliments.

"That goes without saying. If it should become known that you have such a beautiful daughter here, you will be overrun with guests."

"She ain't no daughter o' mine," replied the old man, "sorry as I am to say it. Quite a different family and stock. The young lady's name is Clara Carron."

"Carron!" exclaimed the stranger. "That is an unusual name, and it is a rather singular circumstance that it happens to be my name."

"Are you joking with us, sir?" demanded Clara, who was at the moment more distressed than pleased by this intelligence.

"Joking? Not a bit of it. I am happy to say that I am speaking the exact and serious truth. Andrew Carron is my name."

"I never heard it before now," she remarked.

"May I ask, Miss Carron, from what part of the country you come?"

"From Ohio," she answered.

"Is it possible? Then I am almost ready to swear that I can prove a relationship. What was your father's name?"

"Matthew Carron."

"Who lived at Akron, and whose wife's maiden name was Mary Russell?"

"The same, sir."

"Then I can claim you as my cousin, and I assure you that I am glad and proud to be able to do so. Did you know that your father had a brother named George Carron?"

"I have often heard him speak of his brother George."

"I am the son of George Carron, and consequently your cousin Andrew."

"I am glad to hear it," Clara freely owned. "Relations have been quite scarce with me, as well as friends, until I came here."

"There is another reason," said the young man, "why I am rejoiced at this discovery; but I must beg you to let me keep it until morning, as I am hungry and very tired."

Clara was desirous of seeing more of her new-

found cousin, as well as anxious to hear what special reason he had for being so glad to find her; but he had relapsed into silence and seemed to think of nothing but eating and sleeping.

CHAPTER IX.

CLARA'S GOOD FORTUNE.

JOTHAM ROOT waylaid the stranger the next morning before he could get a chance to speak to Clara again.

Jotham had taken a dislike to this young man who called himself Andrew Carron, and had certain suspicions of his own concerning him, which he wished to verify or cast out.

Though this was not an easy task, as he soon discovered, he stuck to it stubbornly.

In spite of the cool and contemptuous way in which Andrew Carron persisted in ignoring the loutish youth, Jotham succeeded in interviewing him, and in getting answers to such questions as he wished to ask.

"I say, stranger," he remarked, "I would like to know whar you come from, if you will be so good as to tell me."

"I came from the East," replied Andrew, after a supercilious survey of his questioner.

"And whar mought you be goin' to?"

"I am on my way to Santa Fe."

"Come by way o' Salt Lake?"

"Yes."

"See anythin' o' Miss Clara's father there?"

"Her father? No. Is her father at Salt Lake?"

"Sometimes. See anybody thar that you knowed?"

"I have no acquaintances at Salt Lake, and I merely stopped there as I passed through. Why do you ask?"

"Because Miss Clara had a sort of a diffikilty up thar, and I allowed that p'raps you mought ha' heerd suthin' about it."

"If I had, you may be sure that I would have spoken to her about it before now. What sort of a difficulty was it?"

"I hain't got no right to say. She may take a notion to tell you, and I reckon she will."

"Very well. Have you any more questions to ask?"

"None that I think of jest now, thank ye."

"When you happen to think of some more, write them out and send them in."

"Mebbe I will," replied Jotham with a grin.

Clara Carron did choose to tell her story to her cousin.

She could not doubt that he was her cousin, and did not think of doubting it.

He knew so many particulars concerning her family and connections and friends in Ohio, and spoke so familiarly of matters that would not be likely to be known outside of the family, that there could be no question of the relationship.

She also saw, or fancied that she saw, a family resemblance between him and her father.

Besides, what motive could he have for passing himself off as her cousin, if he were not her cousin?

Positively none, and she did not for a moment suspect any fraud or perfidy.

As he was her cousin, and as it was not to be supposed that he could be in any way implicated in the designs of her father and the Mormons, it was right that he should know her story, and she told it to him without the least hesitation.

He listened with the deepest attention, interrupting her now and then to give vent to some expression of sympathy or indignation.

"Nothing could be more fortunate," he said when she had finished her narrative, "than my meeting with you at this time. It is fortunate in more than one way."

"Indeed I am glad enough to find a friend as well as a relation," rejoined Clara.

"There is more than that. But I will come to the main point after a while, and then you will be surprised and pleased. I don't wish to say anything about your father's conduct. It had better be passed over if possible. But I must say that I would not have thought that he could so degrade himself and you, though I have heard that many converts to Mormonism have had their previous ideas of honor and morality greatly changed by the process of conversion. Perhaps his fanaticism had so worked upon his mind that he believed he was doing right, and let us hope he did."

"Even that hope would be no relief to me," observed Clara.

"I don't mean to put it in that light. It is none the less true that you have escaped a great peril. But I think I can now safely assure you that your troubles are at an end, and that a life of peace and plenty is before you. In fact, it was one of my objects in visiting the West to find you and give you the news of the great good fortune that has befallen you."

Clara opened her eyes wide, wondering what this piece of great good fortune might be.

Andrew Carron hastened to explain it to her.

"Do you remember your aunt Hannah?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. She was my mother's sister—the wife of Captain Carver."

"Afterward the widow of Captain Carver, as her husband died on the coast of California."

She then married an old Californian named Antonio de Lerdo, a very wealthy man. He died, and left the bulk of his property to her. Directly after his death she went to New York, but was taken sick on the way, and died in two days after she reached that city. She made a will before her death, and in whose favor do you think it was made?"

"How can I guess?" answered Clara. "Did she have no children?"

"Not a child, and she left every dollar of her property to her niece, Clara Carron."

At this astounding piece of intelligence, Clara almost jumped for joy; Nathan Sollis and his wife testified their delight, and even Jotham Root spread his mouth in a broad grin.

"I was in New York at that time," continued Andrew, "though I was not with her when she died. The lawyer who was made the executor of the will requested me, as I was going West, to make inquiries concerning you, and I went to Akron for that purpose. There I was informed that your father had emigrated to New Mexico. As I was obliged to go to Colorado and Utah to attend to some business matters, I continued my journey westward, and meant to return by way of New Mexico and search for you. It is very fortunate that I have met you here."

"It is indeed very fortunate for me," answered Clara. "But I had supposed that our friends in Akron knew that we had gone to Utah."

"It seems that they did not at that time. At least, those to whom I applied for information knew nothing of it, and I am glad, as it has turned out, that they did not know it, and that it has been my good fortune to find you here."

"I am glad of that, too," she declared.

"I suppose, cousin Clara," he said, "that the news I have brought will put a different face on your affairs. What do you expect to do now?"

"I don't know. It seems to me that my father ought to be informed of this. Perhaps it would make a great change in his plans and purposes."

"No doubt it would, whether the change should be for the better or for the worse. But it is needless for you to run any risks, if not absolutely wrong that you should do so. Mr. Sollis says that it has been your intention to go to New Mexico as soon as he can procure a suitable escort for you. I think you had better hold to that intention."

"I would certainly prefer it," answered Clara.

"And it would be better for you in every way. It would be quite too much for the Mormons to get hold of both you and your property. If you wish your father to share in your prosperity, you can write to him from Santa Fe, telling him what has happened, and requesting him to meet you in New York."

Clara and her friends agreed that this would be the best course for her to pursue.

"You ought not to delay your journey," continued Andrew. "My two guides and myself will be a sufficient escort."

"And what will Jotham do?" inquired Clara, looking sorrowfully at her rough but useful young friend.

"I will go to New Mexico with you," he promptly answered. "You ain't out o' the woods yet, and I mean to see you through. Utah is an unhealthy place for me now, and New Mexico is jest the kentry I'd like to take a look at."

Clara's face brightened at this proposition.

Andrew Carron evidently did not view it with the same favor, but made no open objection, merely saying that he supposed the boy would not be much in the way.

"In the way?" exclaimed Clara. "You do not know, cousin Andrew, how much I owe him."

"Very well. There is no doubt that you will be able to pay him for his services."

"There are some services for which money is not able to pay. But I am glad that you will be with me, Jotham, and that you will go as far as New Mexico, if no further. If my cousin knew you as well as I do, he would never think it possible that you could be in the way."

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD MAN ASTONISHED.

IT WAS SETTLED that Clara should begin her journey immediately, though Nathan Sollis and his wife were greatly grieved at parting with her.

The next morning she and her escort were set across the river, and they began to climb cliffs and traverse deserts.

They had hardly been gone a day when more visitors came to Nathan Sollis's place, again in the shape of a man and two guides.

This man was not as young as Andrew Carron, but was a much finer specimen of mankind, being handsome, well built and well dressed, with the manners of a gentleman and the olive complexion and Spanish air and accent of a descendant of the conquerors of Montezuma.

His guides were rough-looking men, but of a better order than those who had accompanied Andrew Carron, being well-known hunters and miners, who had abandoned the mines in dis-

gust, and had been glad to accept service as guides and escort in an expedition across the country.

The leader of this party astonished Nathan Sollis by inquiring for "a young lady named Clara Carron."

He had sought her at Salt Lake, he said, but learned that she had fled from that locality, and had traced her through the lower settlements to Nathan Sollis's crossing of the Colorado where he hoped to find her.

"Who be you, mister?" demanded the bewildered old man.

"My name is Francisco De Lerdo, and I am from San Francisco. My aunt by marriage is also the aunt of Miss Clara Carron, and I may therefore claim cousinship with that young lady."

"Durned if it ain't a shame. No offense meant to you, mister, but it's an eternal shame."

"What do you mean?" inquired the Californian.

"A little bit ago the poor gal was so short of kin that she didn't know whar to find a friend, and now they're turnin' up and claimin' her, all in a bunch."

"I do not understand you, my good friend. You alarm me, and I beg that you will explain yourself."

"Reckon I will arter a while, if you will fu'st answer a few questions of mine. I want to look into this thing afore I jump."

Nathan Sollis at length succeeded in satisfying himself that De Lerdo had not been sent by Clara's father, and that the young man was not an emissary of Elder Hynes or of any one in the Mormon interest.

He then told Clara's story as he had heard it, bringing the narrative down to the time of her departure with Andrew Carron.

The Californian was greatly surprised, grieved and indignant, and was not slow in letting his surprise and grief and indignation be known.

"It is an infamous fraud!" he exclaimed. "It is a vile and detestable swindle! It is the very thing which I had feared might happen, though I had hoped and prayed that it would not. If I had reached this place a day sooner, what trouble I might have prevented!"

"Pears to me, stranger," observed Nathan Sollis, "that you're gittin' kinder cloudy now. I wish you would talk plain and tell me what's up. Anything the matter with that other cousin of hers?"

"Everything is the matter with him. He is a scoundrel, a villain, an emissary of her father and the Mormons. He is her cousin, I believe, and it is a pity that he is; but he has told her no truth but that, and his motives are vile and treacherous."

"How do you know all this?" demanded the old man.

"My good sir, when you were questioning me concerning myself I did not make known the entire truth. I did not tell you that I had heard at Salt Lake the story of the young lady and her troubles. In the course of my investigations I learned that this cousin, Andrew Carron, reached Salt Lake shortly after her flight had been discovered, and that Matthew Carron and his Mormon allies found him a fitting tool, ready and willing to aid them in their nefarious scheme."

"Do you tell me that fur a fact?" demanded the old man.

"It is the sad and serious truth, Mr. Sollis. It is arranged that Andrew Carron should go in search of his cousin, with two fellows as guides."

"They were tol'able rough, I allow."

"When he should find her he was to tell her some plausible story, so as to induce her to accompany him, and then take her back to Salt Lake."

"The blessed lamb! Was he that kind of a wolf, then?"

"No doubt of it, Mr. Sollis. It was supposed that he would easily be able to perform his contract, as she was not acquainted with him, and would not be likely to suppose that he was connected with her persecutors. As soon as I learned of the villainous scheme I set out in search of her, hoping to find her before she should fall into his hands; but, alas! I am too late."

"This is too thunderin' bad, stranger," said Sollis, "and it goes mightily ag'inst the grain with me. If I could only believe you—"

"The word of a De Lerdo has never been doubted," loftily answered the Californian.

"Like enough; but I don't know anythin' about that, you see. I wish you'd tell me why it is that you are so keen to hunt up the gal."

"I will tell you. It is true that Miss Clara has an aunt, as that fellow said, who married my uncle, Antonio de Lerdo. It is also true that my uncle died and left his widow wealthy, greatly to my sorrow, I must confess."

"That's nateral enough," observed the old man.

"But it is not true that the widow went to New York directly after the death of my uncle, or at any other time. It is also untrue that she died in New York and made Clara Carron her heiress."

"That's quite a different story from t'other chap's. If you could only prove it."

"I can easily prove it. I am the bearer of a letter from Mrs. De Lerdo to Clara Carron, requesting the young lady to come to San Francisco to visit her aunt, and to accept my escort to California. As the bearer of this letter I am now in search of her."

Francisco de Lerdo showed Mr. Sollis a letter, which appeared to be such as he had described it to be, and the bewildered old man hardly knew what to do or say.

He could only advise the Californian to follow on the trail of Clara and her escort, and endeavor to overtake them before she could be returned to Salt Lake.

"If that other cousin means to do as you say he does," he suggested, "he will be likely to circle around and cross the river somewhar about the San Juan or above thar, and keep on up the Green river valley, until he can git through the mountings nigh Salt Lake."

Francisco de Lerdo and his companions were of the same opinion, and they hastened to continue their journey.

When they were gone, Nathan Sollis discussed the whole affair with his wife, whose grief and anxiety were great at the lamentable discrepancy in the statements of the two cousins of Clara Carron; but she could suggest no plan of action that would be likely to settle the question and insure the safety of the girl.

"I was never so bad stumped in my life," declared Nathan. "There is some game bein' played that I can't see into, and I hope I may be shot if I can really believe either of them chaps."

"That's about my notion," observed his wife.

"I don't know what to do about it, my dear, unless I take my rifle, and git on old Calico, and start on the trail of both parties. But what could I do alone?"

The question was settled that very night by the arrival of Frank Ford and his brother Harry.

When the old man had related to them the whole affair, and had explained his fears and misgivings, he found them of his own opinion—doubtful about the character and intentions of both the cousins.

"She has an aunt Hannah," said Frank, "or had such an aunt not long ago, who married for the second time in California; but I can't say whether she is alive or dead. I have heard of her cousin, Andrew Carron. The other man I never heard of."

"How about you, Cap'n Frank," demanded the old man. "I can git the truth out o' you, I reckon. Are you a cousin, or anythin' o' that sort?"

"I am not so lucky. I was acquainted with the family in Ohio, and I am willing to admit that Clara Carron is very dear to me, though I have no reason to suppose that she knows it. I have heard that she was in trouble, and I mean to help her if I can."

"Glad to hear you say so, my boy. I am afeard that she needs help right now. The best thing you can do, I reckon, is to set out on the trail and foller both of them parties."

Frank Ford was of the same opinion, and his brother was eager for adventure.

As soon the next morning as it was light enough to start, they recrossed the river, and took up the trail of De Lerdo and his party, followed by the good wishes and prayers of Nathan Sollis and his wife.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CANYON KING.

JOTHAM ROOT was considerably surprised, but not so much surprisad as troubled, when he noticed the course that was taken by Andrew Carron and his guides after crossing the Colorado.

He had been suspicious of Andrew from the start, and the route as it was continued served to strengthen his suspicions.

Instead of climbing the cliff and journeying westward, the party skirted along the edge of the bluff, over the sandy plain that formed the first plateau, and not a great distance from the river.

When Jotham ventured to ask why this course was taken, he was told that it was for the purpose of finding an easier way of ascending to the table-land.

When he wished to argue the question, he was roughly told that he had better mind his own business and attend to matters which he understood.

The easier way was found after awhile, and a higher plateau was reached.

This seemed to show that the reason given by Andrew Carron was not mere pretense, and Jotham would have been satisfied if there had been nothing more to complain of.

But he could not help perceiving that the general tendency of the course was still in a northeasterly direction, nearly parallel with the river which they had left, and his suspicions returned with greater force than ever.

He took occasion at the next camping-place to remonstrate with Andrew upon this course, and to speak to him privately, as he was unwilling

that Clara should be needlessly alarmed or agitated.

"It seems to me, squire," he said, "that this thing ain't goin' on right, somehow, and that we ain't headin' the way that would take us to New Mexico."

"What do you know about it?" gruffly replied Andrew.

"Reckon I know whar the sun rises and whar it sets, and I know suthin' about the lay o' the land. Daddy Sollis said that Santa Fe was east o' the place we started from, or south of east, and we have been travelin' more north than anythin'. Don't look much like goin' to New Mexico—this don't."

"Do you suppose that you know more about the matter than my guides, who are acquainted with every inch of the country around here? It is their business to show me the easiest and safest route, as well as the nearest, and they understand their business."

"Looks like they don't, though."

"That is impudence. When I believe that you know more about the matter than they do, it will be worth my while to listen to you, but not until then."

"Talk is cheap, squire; but no amount of talk will ever make me believe that we ought to head northeast when we want to go southeast."

"Talk is cheap, my young scrub, as you say, and you have laid in too big a stock of the article at low prices. You had better keep it to yourself hereafter, or it will be worse for you. You were not asked to come on this expedition."

"I'm here, though," casually remarked Jotham.

"But you have nothing to do with it, except to hold your tongue and do as you are told. If I hear any more of your talk, I shall be tempted to drop you on the way to take care of yourself, and you will be lucky if you get off without having your hide tanned."

Jotham walked away, whistling to himself, and nervously clutching the barrel of his rusty rifle.

Andrew Carron's rude speech had confirmed him in the belief that treachery was intended, and he perceived that he was not to be allowed to prevent it.

He was afraid to mention his suspicion to Clara, as it would only give her trouble which he had no prospect of relieving, and it was yet possible that he was mistaken.

If he was not mistaken, there was no chance, as far as he could then see, to extricate Clara from her present difficulty, and he was forced to the conclusion that there was nothing for him to do but to keep his tongue still and his eyes and ears open.

He noticed, but without giving utterance to any more objections, that the course of the party kept a northerly direction until evening, when it was proposed to encamp for the night at the mouth of a canyon where water and grass were to be found.

On entering the canyon they discovered, to their great surprise, that it was already occupied.

The occupancy was not of an alarming nature, as the only person in possession was an old man, who was eating his supper in a shady place, while a powerful gray horse cropped the grass near him.

The old habitant was not disturbed by the tramping of the horses or the voices of the men, but continued his repast until one of the guides dismounted and spoke to him.

Then he rose to his feet and looked at the party.

He was not a very old man—somewhere on the shady side of fifty—though his hair and beard were completely white.

His face was fresh and ruddy, his form was tall and sinewy, and his eyes were keen and penetrating.

"Why do you disturb me?" he demanded. "You see the grass and the water, and there is room enough for us all. Go along and help yourselves."

"We don't want to trouble you, old gentleman," replied Andrew Carron. "We supposed that you would be glad to see us, and that you would want to be sociable."

The old man was not listening. He was intently engaged in looking at Clara Carron—not staringly, but with an expression of wonder, admiration, and the most lively interest.

"You appear to be interested in that young lady," observed Andrew, who had no organ of reverence, and was always ready to talk, whether in or out of place.

The camper made no answer.

"Perhaps you have seen her before," suggested the young man.

"I have seen her or her double. But she was much younger then. Who is she?"

"She is my cousin, and her name is Clara Carron."

"I thought so. How did she come here?"

"By riding a horse, as you can see," was Andrew's flippant reply.

"Where did she come from?"

"From many places. We are last from the Colorado river. I don't suppose you need to know her history."

"Very well," answered the old man. "I am glad to see her, and the rest of you are welcome for her sake."

"I judge by your tone, my friend, that you own this place, though I had supposed it to be public property."

"I have lived here so long, young man, with no person to question my right, that it is no wonder I speak as if I owned the land."

"Possession gives right in some cases, no doubt; but I believe that improvements are needed to constitute a claim."

"Perhaps I could show you some improvements if I wished to. But it's no matter: you are as welcome as I can make you."

"We will avail ourselves of your gracious permission, and will proceed to camp here for the night."

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE old man of the canyon took no more notice of Andrew Carron's sneers, as his attention was absorbed by matters of greater interest to him.

While the camp preparations were in progress, and while the party were eating their supper, he became quite communicative and inquisitive, and really seemed to endeavor to make himself agreeable.

His questions were mostly concerning Clara, upon whom he often fixed his piercing eyes, regarding her with such evident interest as to excite the surprise of both her cousin and herself.

He was so close and pointed in his inquiries as to where she had come from, where she was going to, and how she happened to be absent from her parents, that Andrew Carron became suspicious of his motives and gave short answers to his questions, as if to give him to understand that he was entirely too inquisitive.

Clara was also a little distrustful of him, as she still feared that she might be sought out by Mormon emissaries, and was quite reticent in her replies.

"I would like to know," said Andrew at last, "what your object is in asking so many questions concerning this young lady. You said awhile ago that you thought you had seen her before. Are you still of that opinion?"

"I am," answered the old man.

"When and where did you see her?"

"I said that I had seen her or her double. Is not that enough?"

"Hardly. A person who is so very inquisitive ought to be willing to answer questions as well as ask them. I want to know who *you* are."

The Canyon King rose to his feet, holding in his left hand the long rifle that had lain by his side.

As he stood there, drawn up to his full height, the firelight shining on his gray hair and remarkable features and suit of worn buckskin, he had the appearance of a monarch of the wilderness, whatever his pretensions might have been.

"I am Old Gideon Gray, the Canyon King!" he answered; "the man with a price on his head! Do you know me now?"

Andrew Carron shook his head.

That name might have terrors for some, but it evidently meant nothing to him.

The effect of the name upon the guides was quite different.

They both started, and stared at the Canyon King.

"I've heard of him," said one of them who was known as Monte Bill. "'Twas he who had that trouble with the Mormons about his wife. They say that he killed four or five of 'em, and they will everlastingly rub him out if they ever git holt of him."

From an inner pocket of his hunting-shirt the old denizen of the canyon drew a torn piece of a letter, on which could be dimly seen faded writing and a dark stain.

He held it up before the eyes of the others, pointing at the stain with his long forefinger.

"That is her blood!" Old Gid hoarsely said.

"She had that letter in her bosom when she was shot down at my side. I know the men who did the deed and the man who set them on to do it. Four of them I have killed and notched on this rifle, and there is yet one to be accounted for."

"Reckon you war about right in that business," observed Monte Bill. "You don't need to be afeard of us, old man."

"I am afraid of no man. When the Mormons catch Gideon Gray they will be welcome to kill him. I make no secret of my name or of what I have done. Now I will ask you no more questions, and you need ask me none."

Although Gid Gray's inquisitiveness was at an end, his curiosity was clearly not satisfied, and he kept his eyes and ears open, to catch hints from the conversation of his companions.

Certain indications caused him to suppose that Jotham Root was more in sympathy with him than the others, and he followed that youth when he left the camp to seek some dry wood for the morning's fire.

Jotham went up the canyon, and the old man found him there, about a quarter of a mile from

the camp, where he was lounging about, evidently waiting for something or somebody.

"Glad you've come along, mister," said Jotham. "Did you see me wink at you when I quit camp?"

Gideon was obliged to admit that he had not seen it, Jotham's wink having been a strange contortion of countenance, such as might have been caused by anger or pain.

"Glad you came, though," repeated the lad, "as I've got suthin' to say to you. Any o' them folks in sight?"

"No."

"Reckon we'd better meander a bit further up the canyon, anyhow, so's to be well out o' sight an' hearin'. When I heerd you say that you war Gid Gray, I knowed that you warn't no friend to the Mormons, and I reckon I kin trust you in anythin' that's ag'in' them."

"That you can," answered the sad and vengeful man.

"It's about the young lady, Miss Clara. You seemed to kinder take a notion to her, and I've got my suspicions about that chap who calls himself her cousin."

"What about her? Tell me all at once. I am deeply interested in that young lady and in everything that concerns her. If she is in danger or trouble, there is no one who would be more ready to help her than I, and there are not many who would be better able to help her."

"I'm powerful glad to hear you say that, Mr. Gray. She *does* need help, and I believe in you, and I mean to tell you all about it."

Jotham proceeded to relate all he knew of Clara's history, including her flight from Salt Lake, the account which Andrew Carron had given of himself and of her good fortune, and the strange route he had taken in pretending to travel toward New Mexico.

Old Gideon was intensely interested in the narrative, and at its close he seized both of Jotham's hands and shook them heartily.

"You are a brave boy," he said—"a brave and a good boy. It is fortunate for her that you are with her, as she will be forced to depend upon you. The young man who calls himself Andrew Carron is her cousin, I suppose. He looks and acts like a Carron. But, he has not told her the truth, and I have no doubt that he is an emissary of the Mormons."

"Jest the way it struck me," remarked Jotham.

"He lied to her when he said that her aunt Hannah went to New York after the death of her husband in California, and that she died there. She did nothing of the kind. She has never left California."

"Why, what do *you* know about it?" demanded Jotham, staring at the old man in surprise.

"I know that much about it, and you may be sure that I am telling you the truth. The young lady's aunt *may* be dead, but she was alive not many weeks ago. If she is dead, it is certain that her death occurred in California, not in New York, and that young man knows nothing about it."

"What an all-fired liar he must be!"

"He has surely lied, and no doubt for an evil purpose. The falsehood that he told the young lady, and the fact that he is taking her in a northeasterly direction instead of toward New Mexico, are proof positive that he does not mean well, and he must be in the employ of the Mormons. His intended route is up the Colorado and the Green river valley. There can be no doubt of that."

"That's jest about the way I count it up," observed Jotham. "And now, old gentleman, this thing is gittin' ser'ous. Fur my part, I don't know what to do about it."

"There is little that you can do about it just now, my young friend. Andrew Carron will not be able to go much further without declaring his intention of taking his cousin back to Salt Lake. In the mean time you must make no more objections to his course, as he will drive you away from the party. If you can get a chance to talk to the young lady, without being overheard by him, tell her how matters stand."

"I'll do that, as you say so, as soon as I can."

"But she must not let her cousin know that she *suspects* his purpose. Then, if you can get a chance to escape with her, do so, and follow back on the trail."

"That'll be a tough job, mister, as they'll be sart'in to git arter us."

"You may depend upon it that I will be near to help you. If you can find no such chance, I hope to be able to head the party off before they get far up the valley. This is the best advice I can give you at present."

"It does me a heap of good," replied Jotham, "and I'm powerful glad, old gentleman, that I met you. It would break me all up if Miss Clara should git kerried back to Salt Lake after all."

"You had better go back to camp now, my young friend, as your absence might cause those people to suspect something. Whatever happens, until you can escape, don't do or say anything to let Carron know that you suspect him."

Old Gideon who had brought his gray horse from the camp, rode on up the canyon, and Jotham Root returned to his party.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COLLISION OF COUSINS.

WHEN Andrew Carron and his companions broke camp in the morning, Gid Gray was not there, and many comments were made upon his absence, in view of the fact that he had appeared to take such a deep interest in at least one of the party.

"Mebbe he was afeard that we mought take him and give him up to the Mormons," remarked Monte Bill.

"He may have been afraid of that," replied Andrew; "but he had not the look of a man who would be easily frightened. He followed you up the canyon, Jotham. Did he run across you there?"

"I see'd him ridin' away, and he said good-by to me."

"Was that all? Well, there is nothing very strange about the man, as far as I can see, with the exception of the great interest that he seemed to take in you, cousin Clara. That was suspicious, to say the least of it."

"For my part," answered Clara, "I was inclined to be afraid of him, and was glad when he left us. I hope we will not see him again."

"We are not likely to, and we can pursue our journey without troubling ourselves about him."

The party soon came out upon another sandy plain, across which they saw another tall cliff rise before them.

Their course was still in a northerly direction; but Jotham Root made no further objection to this, and endeavored to conduct himself so as to excite no more suspicions on the part of Andrew Carron.

He had no chance to speak to Clara privately, and it did not seem that he was likely to get any such chance.

He looked over the landscape frequently and anxiously, but saw nothing of Old Gid Gray.

His suspicions of Andrew Carron were hourly growing stronger, and the prospect of getting Clara out of her cousin's power was faint indeed.

When the party were half-way across the sandy plain, he looked back and descried another party, which had just entered it.

To this party he naturally called the attention of his companions, who examined it and commented upon it.

It was composed of three persons, whom the guides pronounced to be white men.

They were riding rapidly, as if with the intention of overtaking the larger party in advance of them.

"Who and what can they be?" asked Andrew, whose countenance showed that he was disquieted, if not actually alarmed.

"They've lifted our trail, and are follerin' it up," remarked Monte Bill. "That much is sart'in. Do you know of anybody, boss, who would be apt to be comin' arter us?"

"I do not. I can't imagine why we should be pursued."

"Perhaps they are Mormons," suggested Clara.

"I think not; I wonder if they are really pursuing us."

"They're comin' arter us," said Monte Bill, "whether they mean harm or not. Shall we give 'em a run for it?"

"We ought not to cry before we are hurt. There are but three of them, and we are four. I think we ought to ride along at our usual gait, without paying any attention to them. But we must be ready to meet them if they do mean harm."

This course was adopted.

Rifles were made ready, and pistols were loosened in their belts, to be handy in case the pursuers should give evidence of hostile intentions, though the pursued party jogged along as usual, without appearing to notice the fact that they were followed.

When Jotham Root first saw the strangers as they made their appearance on the plain, he had been struck by the idea that Gideon had found a couple of friends, with whom he was coming to the assistance of the young lady in whom he had shown so deep an interest.

Acting on this belief, he prepared for fight as the others did, but with the expectation that the contents of his long rifle would find a lodgment in the body of one of his present companions, instead of being directed at their pursuers.

As the approaching party came nearer this illusion was dispelled, and he perceived to his sorrow that none of those three could be mistaken for Old Gideon Gray.

A dark, Spanish looking man, well dressed, with the air and manner of a gentleman, accompanied by two men in the rough but serviceable attire of plainsmen—such was the appearance of the pursuing party upon a closer view.

As they did not manifest any hostile intentions when they came within rifle range, Andrew Carron's party rode on slowly until the others came up and joined them.

The Spanish looking man bowed politely to Andrew Carron, bent low before Clara, and proceeded to make known his business.

"Is this young lady Miss Clara Carron?" he asked pleasantly but quite unexpectedly.

"She is," gruffly answered Andrew.

"Are you her cousin, Andrew Carron?"

"I am."

"As she appears to be in your escort, permit me to inquire whither you are taking her."

"Before I answer any more of your questions," said Andrew, "I must know what right you have to ask them."

"You shall have all the information you wish. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Francisco de Lerdo, at your service, and I am from California. I am the nephew of Antonio de Lerdo, whose widow is the aunt of this young lady."

Clara's astonishment was such that she almost stared at the young stranger.

"Without presumption, therefore," he continued, "I may call myself the cousin of Miss Clara Carron. I am, also, her most sincere friend and well-wisher."

The Californian laid his hand upon his heart at the conclusion of this speech, and made a profound bow to Clara.

She answered it with a smile which meant that she was glad to discover that she was better supplied with cousins than she had supposed herself to be.

Andrew gave utterance to an unmistakable grunt which showed that he was not at all pleased at the turn affairs had taken.

"Suppose this to be true," he said—"though I see no reason why I should make the supposition—suppose it to be true, what then?"

"Your manner is scarcely courteous, sir," replied Francisco. "Like your face, it is more plain than attractive."

"You needn't trouble yourself about my face. Tell me what you want here?"

"I have the honor to inform you and this young lady, that I am the bearer of a letter from her aunt, Senora de Lerdo, inviting Miss Clara to visit her at her home in California, and requesting her to accept my escort for that purpose."

"Can that be my aunt Hannah?" exclaimed Clara, who was now thoroughly surprised and mystified.

"The same," answered the Californian.

"I supposed that she was dead."

"When and where did you suppose she had died?"

"Not long ago—in New York."

"She has never been in New York—has never left California—since she married my uncle, Antonio de Lerdo."

The two parties were now jogging along over the plain together, in an apparently amicable manner, the conversation being confined to the principal persons.

Jotham Root, happening to look up at the tall cliff before them, was quite sure that he saw two men peering over its edge, though he could hardly distinguish them at that distance.

He wondered whether one of them might not be Gideon Gray. This was at least possible, and he was glad to see the men there.

If this hope should fail him, and if the dispute which was then in progress should terminate in something more deadly than words, he was determined to side with the last comers, as he was then fully convinced of the baseness of Andrew Carron's motives.

CHAPTER XIV.

A QUARREL ROUGHLY ENDED.

ASTONISHED at what she had heard from the Californian, Clara Carron looked inquiringly at Andrew.

The statement just made by De Lerdo was so directly opposed to that which she had received from the other cousin, that she could not help feeling that an explanation was called for.

"Is it worth while to listen to this man?" angrily demanded Andrew. "We do not know him, cousin Clara, and have no reason to believe that he is the person he represents himself to be."

"What motive can he have, Andrew, for telling untruths?"

"I don't know what his motive may be; but he has some object, of course, in attempting to deceive you."

"What I have told you is true," calmly observed Francisco, also addressing himself to Clara. "If any person has told you differently, you have been falsely informed."

"Take care what you say, sir," fiercely exclaimed Andrew.

"Falsely informed," repeated the Californian. "If you have been told that your aunt went to New York and died there, you have been falsely informed. Permit me to hand you the letter from her which I was commissioned to bring you, and in which she requests you to come and visit her."

Clara took the letter that was handed her, and read it carefully, but with a perplexed and troubled air.

"I never saw my aunt's handwriting," she said; "and I don't know what to think."

"I know what I think," broke in Andrew. "I have no doubt that this is some sort of an imposition, and that it is useless to talk about it. You know, Clara, that I am your cousin; but you have no means of deciding whether this stranger is an impostor or not."

"Very well," quietly remarked the Californian. "I will now give you some more information, Miss Clara, and you will then be able to determine who is the impostor. I went to Salt Lake to seek you."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Andrew. "The man is sent by the Mormons."

"Not this man. Some other man. At Salt Lake I heard of your flight and its cause. I also happened to learn that this cousin of yours reached the city shortly after you had left, and that he became a willing tool of the Mormons, who took advantage of his relationship to send him in search of you. When he should find you, he was to impose upon you by some plausible tale, inducing you to put yourself in his charge, and was then to take you back to Salt Lake, for which act of treachery he expects to be well paid."

Clara was deeply agitated and distressed.

The statements of the Californian were so direct and positive that she did not know what to believe, and could only be sure that she was in trouble.

She looked at Andrew, expecting him to answer the stranger's accusation.

"It is all an infernal lie!" exclaimed that young man.

"I shall ask you to repeat that remark at some other time," said De Lerdo, "as I am not accustomed to quarreling in the presence of ladies. Of course, Miss Clara, I have only my word to support me in the assertions I have just made; but you can furnish proof that the motives of this cousin of yours are at least open to suspicion."

"How can I?" inquired Clara.

"When you left the Colorado river, did he not promise to take you to New Mexico?"

"He did."

"Do you know the direction of Santa Fe from the point where you left the Colorado?"

"It is nearly east, I believe."

"Something south of east. Do you know the direction you have been traveling since you left the river?"

"I supposed that we were going toward Santa Fe," she answered.

"On the contrary you have been going away from there. You have been traveling in a northerly direction, and are now many miles further from Santa Fe than you were when you crossed the river. The route you have been pursuing, as any man here can tell you, will take you through Utah, up the Green river valley, and thus to Salt Lake."

Clara was so frightened and bewildered that she could not speak.

"That's as true as gospel!" exclaimed Jotham Root. "That's the way I count it up, and that's jest what old Gid Gray says."

They were now in the shadow of the cliff. Before them lay a gorge which they must ascend in order to reach the plateau above.

Jotham had not again seen the two men at the edge of the cliff; but he hoped that they were near at hand, and he had determined, at all events, to side with De Lerdo in the event of a conflict.

Clara looked at one of her cousins, and then at the other; but her glance finally settled on Jotham.

"Why have you said nothing to me about this?" she demanded.

"Cause I couldn't git a chaine. I spoke to him about it twice"—pointing at Andrew—"but he told me that I didn't know what I was talkin' about, and the last time he threatened to drive me away if I said anythin' more. But I knowed it was wrong all the time, and Old Gid Gray said so, too; and I was jest hangin' on, waitin' and tryin' to do the best I could."

Andrew Carron looked thunder-storms at the lad, but Francisco de Lerdo bestowed upon him an appreciative glance, as if glad that he had found an ally.

"Is it true, then," inquired Clara, "that I have been going back toward Salt Lake, instead of traveling toward Santa Fe?"

"That's jest the way it looks to me," answered Jotham, "and I meant to tell you what I thought about it, as soon as ever I could git a chaine."

She turned toward Andrew Carron.

"What have you to say to this?" she sternly demanded. "Is it possible that you have been mean enough to betray me in this way?"

"If you can believe the words of an utter stranger and a born idiot," he replied, "in preference to mine, I don't think it worth while for me to say anything about it."

"Jotham is no idiot. I am sure that he is honest, and that he would not tell me an untruth. I know, too, and have good reason to know that he is very intelligent and shrewd. When he tells me that you have been taking me toward Salt Lake, instead of toward Santa Fe, I am bound to believe him. If this is true, I cannot doubt that you told me a falsehood concerning the death of my aunt, as this gentleman says you did. I know nothing about him, except that he appears to be a gentleman; but it is certain that I can have no more confidence in you."

By this time they had reached the cliff, and were at the mouth of the gorge.

Andrew Carron's countenance expressed anger and chagrin, but no shame or remorse.

He had the look of a man who has been driven to the wall, but is still undecided whether to fight or surrender.

"What do you expect to do about it?" he doggedly asked.

"I want to be taken back to Mr. Sollis," answered Clara.

"Well, you won't be, and that's an end of it."

"You kin bet on me, Miss Clara," remarked Jotham.

"It is for the young lady to decide," said De Lerdo. "She shall be taken wherever she wishes to go."

"Not if I know myself," declared Andrew. "I have written instructions from her father to take care of her, and I mean to carry out those instructions. Whoever stands in my way had better get out of it."

He looked at his guides, and they handled their weapons as if ready to fight.

But three men on the other side were also prepared, and Jotham's rusty rifle was already cocked.

"We await your decision, Miss Carron," said Francisco, without appearing to notice these warlike preparations.

"For God's sake don't fight!" she implored. "There is trouble enough without that."

They had then got within the gorge, and were so absorbed in their own affairs that none of them noticed the tip of a feather, or a bit of bronze skin, or the gleam of a pair of wicked eyes, behind the rocks that lined the rugged pathway.

It was not until a volley of bullets and a flight of arrows whizzed and hurtled among them that they perceived that they were in the presence of enemies, and then it was too late to guard against the attack, as they were surrounded and overwhelmed by a band of murderous Apaches!

The struggle was over in a few moments.

One of Andrew Carron's guides was dead, together with one of those who came with De Lerdo.

All the others were prisoners in the hands of the savages, with the exception of one of Francisco's men who escaped and could not be overtaken.

CHAPTER XV.

CORTEZ THE CONQUEROR.

HARDLY had Cortez Castarra come to the conclusion that Red Sleeve and his Apaches were lying in wait for Clara Carron and her companions, when he espied another party, which had just begun to cross the plain.

The men who composed this party were riding at full speed, as if anxious to overtake the others.

"This affair is getting mixed, as the Yankees say," remarked the Mexican. "Those people appear to be pursuing our friends below, and I judge that there is a fair prospect of a collision. But there are others down there, who can easily overwhelm them all. What shall we do, Pedrillo?"

"We had better draw back and conceal ourselves. I see no chance to do anything more at present."

The Mexicans concealed themselves behind the rocks, and watched the plain until the second party had joined the first, and both had gone under the cliff out of their sight.

"They seem to be friendly enough," said Castarra. "The collision is not to come in that way, but will happen when they meet the Apaches. It is a terrible thing to me, Pedrillo, that I must stop here and suffer the loss of my love to fall into the hands of those savages. And yet, what can be done?"

"We could not have given a warning, senor, as our voices would not reach so far, and any other attempt might have been regarded as a signal to come on."

"There were seven of them, Pedrillo, when the two parties came together. They ought to make a pretty good fight, if the surprise should not be too sudden. But they will never see those Apaches until they feel them."

"No doubt of that."

"If we could go down the gorge, and strike the Indians in the rear—"

"It is too late for that. Listen, senor!"

Castarra listened, and the noise of shots and yells came faintly up from below.

In a few moments the sounds had ceased, and all was as quiet as before.

"It was soon over," said Cortez sadly. "The white men had no chance, and the fair Clara is in the power of the Apaches. I must now prove my love, and perhaps win hers, by taking her from them."

"That is easy to say, senor," replied Pedrillo; "but thirty picked Apaches, with Red Sleeve at their head, will be much in your way."

"Very true, my friend; but I think we have gone through worse troubles than that. The first thing necessary is to know what sort of work is before us. Remain here, Pedrillo, with the horses, while I go down into the gorge and reconnoiter."

Pedrillo Mocco had a long time to wait, as nearly two hours had elapsed when his leader returned.

Castarra was greatly perplexed and saddened by the discoveries he had made.

"There is water and a little grass," he said, "down yonder at the mouth of the gorge. The Indians have encamped, and I believe they will remain there until to-morrow morning. It is useless for us to attempt to do anything before night, and then we must operate from the plain."

"And we must descend the cliff," suggested Pedrillo.

"Of course we must, and how we are to get down there, is the thing that puzzles me. It is impossible to descend the gorge with our horses while the Apaches are there, and we are nothing without our horses."

"But I know another route by which we can reach the plain. I have been here before, senior, and I never forget."

"Is it far?"

"It is a long way, but we can get there before night."

"Pedrillo, you are a jewel. Lead the way."

It was nearly dark when the Mexicans, after scrambling down a steep and dangerous pathway, at length found themselves on the plain which they had wished to reach, and they carefully skirted the foot of the cliff, until they were as close to the camp of the Apaches as they dared to ride.

Then the horses were concealed, and Castarra again went to reconnoiter and lay his plans.

He found the Apaches encamped a short distance up the gorge, where they were quite at their ease and entirely unapprehensive of danger, as they well might be in that locality.

Concealing himself behind piles of broken sand-rock, the Mexican crawled up like a snake within plain sight of their camp-fire, and discovered that they had as prisoners four white men and Clara Carron.

She was seated at the foot of a large rock, and was neither bound nor guarded, her captors being sure that there was no chance for her to escape.

As the light of the moon shone full upon her face, which was upturned in silent prayer, it showed that she was very beautiful, and it was no wonder that Cortez Castarra set his teeth together and vowed that he would run all risks to free her from her peril.

He did not take particular note of the male prisoners, except to observe that one of them was but a little distance from her.

The three others were near the camp-fire, among the Apaches, who looked wild and fierce and cruel enough, as the red firelight flashed upon their bronzed skins and reflected the wicked gleaming of their dark eyes.

In a few moments Castarra had formed his plan of action.

He withdrew from the vicinity of the camp as stealthily as he had approached it, and hastened back to Pedrillo, to whom he explained his intentions.

"Your part of this game," he said, "will be separate from mine. It will be your duty to draw off the attention of the Apaches by operating from the right side of the gorge, while I endeavor to steal the young lady from them on the left."

"You may trust me for that, senior."

"If it is possible, you should have your horse near at hand, so that you can make your escape; but I cannot tell you how to act, and must leave all the details to your own judgment."

"I will know what to do," replied Pedrillo. "As I told you, I have been here before, and I can hide myself and my horse. I will draw off the attention of the Apaches in a way which they will have cause to remember, and it is quite likely that some of them will get hurt."

"Very well. My movements will be measured by yours. You must give me time to crawl up to the camp and place myself in communication with the young lady. Then the success of my effort will depend upon your skill in getting up an excitement among the Indians."

"You know how I hate these Apaches, senior, and in particular that devil, Picoto."

"Adios, amigo, and if I never see you again—"

"Vaya! We may separate, senior, but we will meet again. Our time to die has not yet come."

Leaving Pedrillo to his own devices, Castarra led his horse over the plain, making a wide circuit, until he reached a position on the left of the gorge and in the rear of the Apache camp.

The Indians were still collected about their fire, which had been built near one of the water-holes in the bed of a dry stream.

Most of them were asleep; but a few, besides the sentries, were awake and seated together. Behind these the ground rose slightly to a ridge that was covered with boulders and large bits of broken rock.

Near the foot of the ridge, and at the base of a rock, Clara Carron was seated.

Her hands and feet had been bound since Castarra last saw her there; but she was not asleep.

At a little distance from her was one of the male prisoners, who was also bound and awake.

Just over the ridge, and nearly shut out from

the view of the camp by the rock, the horses of the Apaches were picketed.

Castarra had already perceived that there was a fine opportunity to play the game at which the Indians were adepts—that of stampeding their stock.

He knew that they would not have left their horses so far from camp and without a guard unless they had been entirely unapprehensive of danger, and he rejoiced in their fancied security, as it gave him a clear field for his operations.

He led his horse up to the others, and easily picked out that which belonged to Clara, as her saddle was lying near it.

This horse he saddled, and threw the bridle-rein over the pommel of his own saddle, knowing that his trained steed would not stir from the spot where he was left.

The next thing necessary was to open communication with Clara, and this was no difficult matter.

When he had crawled as near to her as he dared, he made a slight noise to attract her attention.

She started, and he spoke to her softly.

"Senorita! Miss Clara!"

"Who is there?"

"Sh-sh! Not so loud. I am a friend, and have come to save you from the savages."

"Surely I know your voice. May I see your face?"

The Mexican crawled around the rock until he was close enough to touch her.

"I am Cortez Castarra," he whispered, "who was with you in Santa Fe when your mother died. By the mercy of God I am here to help you. Will you trust me?"

"I will, and I thank God for this help, as I had expected nothing better than death. But what can you do?"

"In the first place I can cut the thongs with which your sweet hands are bound."

He quickly severed the leather at her wrists, and handed her the knife, bidding her cut the bonds at her feet.

"You are now free," he said when she had done this, and you have nothing to do but to sit still, just as you were, until you can safely leave this place. Your horse is saddled and ready for you."

"Must I go alone?" she asked. "There are other prisoners."

"True, but I am not able to manage so many, and they are out of my reach. I am alone here, or with but one friend to help me, and it will be as much as I can do to make sure of your safety."

"There is one, my kind friend, whom I wish you could help."

She nodded her head toward the prisoner who was seated at a little distance from her, and who happened to be Jotham Root.

"He is near us," she whispered, "and I cannot desert him. He helped me to escape from the Mormons, and has been a most faithful friend."

Jotham's face was turned toward the camp; but Castarra must have been sure, from what he could see of him, that this faithful friend would not be a dangerous rival.

"I will do what I can," said the Mexican. "If you will speak to him as softly as possible, and let him know what I am about to attempt, I will watch the chance to set him free."

As Clara began to open communication with Jotham Root, something occurred to distract the attention of the Apaches from the proceedings in their rear.

It was a noise, like the snarling of a wild animal, among the rocks on the other side of the ravine.

Slight as it was, it was sufficient to cause the two sentinels and the other Apaches who were awake to prick up their ears and listen for its repetition.

It was not only repeated, but was accompanied by a manifestation as unexpected as it was singular.

On the flat top of a large rock, some twenty yards from the camp-fire, a bright light suddenly flamed up, followed by a flashing and a fizzing, as if damp powder were being burned.

This strange occurrence caused the Apaches to lay their heads together in consultation, and the outcome of the consultation was that one of their number arose, with his gun in his hand, and started to examine the mysterious rock.

He moved carefully and stealthily as he approached it, looking and listening at every step; for he doubtless expected to find an enemy concealed there; but there was nothing to be seen or heard.

He reached the rock, and began to circle around it, with his body bent forward, striving to peer into the recesses and shadows.

Then came a wild shriek—it was his death-cry—and he threw up his hands and fell backward with a knife through his heart.

The yell aroused all the Apaches.

Those who had been awake explained the mysterious occurrence to those who had been sleeping, and there was a general hurried consultation among them.

They were ignorant of the nature of the calamity that had befallen their comrade, but

could not doubt that he was dead, as he had not stirred or spoken since he uttered that cry.

At the command of Red Sleeve six stalwart and well-armed warriors, led by Picoto, moved toward the mysterious rock.

As they came near it five of them halted, with leveled guns, and Picoto went forward.

When the sub-chief reached the body of his slain comrade, and bent down to examine it, he did not see a sinewy arm that was thrust out from a crevice in the rock; but he felt the sharp blow of a knife, which struck him in the region of the heart.

The arm had been seen by the other Apaches, who were covering Picoto with their rifles, and his cry of pain and anger had hardly reached their ears when all five fired at once.

It would have been better for them if they had been less hasty.

Suddenly appeared before them, as if he had jumped out of the rock, a short and square-built man, with a revolver in his right hand, the chambers of which he emptied among them with such marvelous rapidity that all who were not struck down made haste to get back to camp.

The last shot of the secret and solitary foe was reserved for Picoto as he was attempting to crawl away.

In another moment the white man had stripped off the scalp of the slain warrior, and he waved it in the air with a cry of triumph.

The Apaches answered with a yell of rage, and nearly all the men who had been left at the camp started up and ran toward the fatal rock, intent upon avenging the death of their comrade.

But they had got only a little distance when a fresh alarm compelled them to halt.

This was caused by the stampede of their horses, the result of Castarra's operations.

As soon as the fall of the first warrior caused a consternation among the Apaches, the Mexican ran down to where Jotham Root was seated, and cut his bonds.

He then hastened back to Clara, led her rapidly to her horse, and assisted her to mount.

By the time she was in the saddle Jotham had reached the spot, and had selected and mounted a horse.

During the excitement that preceded and followed the disastrous enterprise of Picoto and his comrades their proceedings were not observed by the Apaches.

When his two companions were mounted, Castarra cut the picket lines of all the other horses, and started them into a stampede by a few blows with the end of a lariat.

Bidding Clara and Jotham to follow him, he dashed off in the midst of the drove.

CHAPTER XVI.

HARRY FORD FINDS AN ADVENTURE.

FRANK and Harry Ford, as they followed the trail of Clara Carron and her false friends, came to the mouth of a canyon where a halt had been made by those who preceded them.

As the young men had been riding very rapidly since they left the river, their horses were fatigued and needed rest.

Night was coming on, too, and it would not be possible to follow the trail much further before morning.

They thought it best, therefore, to spend the remaining moments of daylight in ascertaining whether the second party in advance of them had also made a stop there, or had followed the trail without halting.

Frank Ford, after studying the tracks and "sign," came to the conclusion that the first party had undoubtedly passed the night in the canyon, but the second had gone on after a short stay, if they had made any stay at all.

"Judging by the indications we have seen so far," observed Frank, "the California cousin must have caught up with Andrew Carron before now, and I would give something to have been present at the meeting."

"Of course they quarreled," suggested Harry.

"Yes, it is quite likely that some sharp words passed between them, if not some hard blows, and I would be glad to know which of them got the best of it."

"Perhaps they called on Miss Clara to settle the dispute."

"I think she would be puzzled to decide between them, if she knows no more about the matter than we do. For my part, I am inclined to believe that both the cousins, if they are cousins, are rascals, and that there are some schemes afoot which we can only guess at."

"You say that because you are jealous, Frank. Lovers are always opposed to cousins."

"That may be. It is certain that I am opposed to both of those cousins. But I am glad that they have come together, as I think their meeting will have one good result."

"What is that?"

"Clara won't be carried back to Salt Lake."

"That must be prevented anyhow. But what are you going to do now, old fellow? I don't see any use in traveling up the canyon any further."

"There are a number of tracks leading in this direction," answered Frank, "and I am

wondering where they lead to. It is possible that we may learn something by following them."

The bed of the canyon grew narrower as the young men ascended it, and its sides became higher and closer together, until the little daylight that remained was so completely obscured that they were unable to see the tracks in the sand and gravel without dismounting to discover them.

Then they turned back toward the point from which they had started in.

As they did so their horses jumped, startled by a cracking noise, and then by the crashing fall of a large mass of rock from the cliff that formed one side of the canyon.

Together they reined in their horses and looked around, and together they uttered exclamations of surprise and affright at the spectacle that presented itself.

Far up on the side of the cliff—so far that her features were scarcely distinguishable in the growing darkness—stood a woman or girl, poised upon a sharp ridge or pinnacle of rock, while from below came the dust of the mass which had crumbled and fallen from beneath her feet, leaving the cliff smooth and pathless.

In her two hands she held a light climbing pole or staff with which she appeared to balance herself in that dizzy and perilous position, while every moment seemed about to precipitate her upon the rocks below.

Frank Ford took in the situation at once.

Quickly dismounting, he unstrapped a blanket that was fastened to the cantle of his saddle, and called to his brother to follow him.

They stationed themselves at the foot of the cliff, immediately below the pinnacle on which the girl was poised, and Frank spread out the blanket, one end of which he held firmly, while Harry seized the other two corners.

With the one hasty glance which she had dared to cast downward the girl had seen and understood this movement for her succor; but the distance was great, and it may well be supposed that she shuddered at the alternative presented to her.

Frank Ford called to her in his clear, ringing tones.

"Jump, and we will catch you! Jump clear and straight, with your feet well together! It is your only chance!"

Strength and hope were in that manly and encouraging voice, and the girl hardly hesitated then.

She dropped her pole, leaped out into the air, and came down as Frank had told her to come, with her feet well together, and her arms close to her sides.

"Hold hard, Harry!" cried Frank, and the young men noted her descent, moved the blanket to meet it, and braced themselves for the shock.

She fell straight as she had started, striking the center of the stout Navajo blanket with her feet, and even her light weight, dropping from such a distance, was sufficient to bring the two men to their knees.

But her fall had been broken, and both of them let go the blanket and hastened to raise and help her.

Harry was the fortunate one who was the first to touch her.

He took her in his arms and gazed eagerly at her face.

She was motionless and deathly pale.

"Give me your canteen," he whispered to Frank. "She is surely not dead. She has only fainted."

"No," answered the girl in a faint voice, and moving nothing but her lips.

"No, I have not fainted, and am not going to faint. Let me rest a moment, just so."

Harry was quite willing to let her rest "just so," and he held her carefully and tenderly until she opened her eyes and attempted to get up.

With his assistance she arose and stood on her feet, considerably shaken, pale and nervous, but unharmed.

Admiration was added to the surprise of the brothers as they looked at her.

She was a slender girl of sixteen or seventeen, with clear complexion, regular features, and an air of intelligence and good breeding.

Her large eyes matched her dark hair, and the rich bloom of a blush overspread her cheeks, as she realized the fact that her preservers were two handsome young men.

Her dress was neat, plain and substantial, such as might be worn by the working daughter of a thriving ranchman.

"Are you really not hurt?" joyfully inquired Harry Ford.

"Not a bit, I believe," was her welcome answer.

"But I am afraid that you are too weak to walk. Allow me to assist you."

"No, thank you. If you will bring me my stick, I will be obliged to you."

Harry ran and picked up the pole which she had thrown down, and brought it to her.

She took it from him with a smile and a graceful inclination of her head, and used it as a staff, steadying her steps until she reached a flat rock near by, where she seated herself and

looked up at the point from which she had leaped.

"How did it happen?" asked Harry, who seemed disposed to appropriate this waif to himself.

"How did you get up yonder, and what caused the rock to fall?"

"I had often been up there," she answered, "and had climbed higher than the place where you saw me, and I thought there was no danger."

"I was coming down, as it was getting dark in the canyon, and had stepped where I always step, when the rock gave way, and all the path fell out from under me. It is a wonder that I did not go with it."

"My stick helped me; but I could not have balanced there any longer, and would have been dashed to pieces on those rocks if you had not come to my help, and I don't know how you could have thought of saving me as you did."

"It was Frank who thought of that," observed Harry. "My stupid head would never have hit upon such a scheme."

"But he could have done nothing without you. Is he your brother?"

"Yes; he is Frank Ford, and I am Harry Ford. What is your name?"

"Ida Russell."

"That is a pretty name, and it suits you. As you say that you have often climbed that cliff, I suppose you must live somewhere about here."

The girl appeared to be embarrassed by this suggestion, and she made no reply.

"May I ask why you climbed to that dangerous place?" inquired Frank.

"I was looking for my father. I was expecting him to come this way. Hark! I think I hear him now."

She pointed down the canyon, and from that direction the young man soon saw a horseman approaching them.

As he neared the group, the central figure of which was Ida Russell, he quickened his pace until he reached them.

He cast a quick and searching glance at the two young men, and another at the mass of fallen rock at the foot of the cliff.

"What has happened, Ida?" he demanded. "Who are your friends?"

In a few words the girl told him of the accident, the peril and the rescue, and presented to him the brothers who had saved her life.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said as he turned to them. "If my daughter hasn't done that, it will have to be left undone. It is a matter that goes outside of any words I ever learned. I am not often willing to meet strangers here, but am glad to see both of you. I never forget faces, and I think that you, sir, though my daughter did not mention your name, are Frank Ford. I am not so sure of the other; but he may be your brother Harry."

"And who are *you*?" demanded Frank, surprised at meeting in that wilderness a person who knew him.

"I am called Gid Gray in these parts."

"I don't remember the name."

"Quite likely. If you should remember me at all, it would be by another name. And now, if it is a fair question, what do you happen to be doing here?"

It was natural for Frank Ford to believe that he would lose nothing by explaining his business to this old man, and he proceeded to tell what had brought him there.

When he mentioned the name of Clara Carron old Gideon listened attentively; but he interrupted the narrator when he spoke of Francisco de Lerdo and the second expedition.

"I saw nothing of those," said the old man. "They must have gone by without stopping. Poor Clara! she is in trouble indeed, and the affair has turned out just as I suspected it would."

"Why, what do you know about it?" demanded Frank. "Are you acquainted with her?"

"Is it surprising that I should be acquainted with her? You know that I recognized you two. She and her escort camped at the mouth of this canyon last night. Let us go down there, and I will camp with you and tell you what I know about it."

"I supposed," suggested Frank, "from your daughter's statement that she had often climbed the cliff yonder, that you must have a settlement somewhere in this vicinity."

"Has that anything to do with Clara Carron and her affairs? If you want my help—and I know you will need it—you must be content to let me give it to you in my own way."

It seemed to Frank Ford that Old Gid Gray's actions resembled those of a bird that tries to draw passers-by from the neighborhood of its nest; but he restrained his curiosity, and accepted the old man's answer as an intimation that he had better mind his own business.

When he went to get his horse, which he had allowed to stray in search of scattered bits of grass, he perceived that Harry was strapping his own blanket to his brother's saddle, in place of that which had been used for the benefit of Ida Russell.

"What are you doing?" demanded Frank. "Where is my blanket?"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud. I am swap-

ping blankets with you. This is as good as yours, and I want the other."

"I understand. You want the blanket which she was caught in. You seem to be hard hit, my boy. Well, you may have the blanket, and I wish you luck."

At the mouth of the canyon a fire was built, and Gid Gray and his daughter shared the provisions which the Fords had brought from Nathan Sollis's.

As they ate together the old man told of his meeting with Clara Carron and her escort, and of his subsequent conversation with Jotham Root.

"I had no doubt," he said, "that it was her cousin's intention to take her back to Salt Lake, and the young man who helped her to escape was of the same opinion."

"She could rely on him, I suppose," suggested Frank Ford.

"Yes, for all he could do. I gave him such instructions as I could, and he promised to attempt to get her out of their power; but it is not likely that he would be able to do that."

"What could be done, then?"

"I meant to get some help, if possible, and intercept them at the crossing or in the valley above. I hope that nothing of the kind will be necessary now."

Frank Ford was of the opinion that Andrew Carron's Salt Lake expedition would probably receive a check, if it had not already come to grief, and that it would be needless to wait for any more assistance.

It was settled that he and his brother should rest at the mouth of the canyon that night, with the King of the Canyon and his daughter, and should resume their pursuit at an early hour in the morning.

As Harry declared that there was no sleep in him, he was allowed to stand guard while the others slept.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HUNTED MAN'S FORTRESS.

THERE was no sleep in Harry Ford, as he had said, because a new idea had taken possession of him.

That idea was love, and its embodiment was Ida Russell.

She was lying there on the dry sand, in the mild and dewless atmosphere, wrapped in that stout Navajo blanket, which had thus acquired another claim upon his affection, and he hoped that she was dreaming of him.

He was certain that he was dreaming of her as he stood there wide awake, attending to his duties with the pleasant feeling that he was keeping watch over her slumbers.

Was that old man *really* her father?

Had she grown up there, amid those sandy deserts and giant ravines?

It was not possible that she had already found a lover in that wilderness.

No; he must have been the first to find her there, and she was his by right of discovery.

If that claim should not be sufficient, she would be his by the right of that sudden but lasting love that had sprung up in his heart.

The moonlight was favorable to these meditations, and so was the scene, and so was the silence.

Such a wakeful sentinel did not care to be relieved, and Harry continued his watch, and the moonlight was just as serene, and the scene was just as calm, and the silence was just as intense, until along in the small hours of the morning, when the distant noise of horses' feet attracted his attention.

Having satisfied himself of the nature of the sounds, Harry hastened to arouse his companions, but found Gid Gray already awake and on his feet.

A hunted man has quick ears, and he who had been outlawed by the Mormons was as much on the alert for indications of danger as was the sentinel on guard.

Frank was at once aroused, and all mounted their horses, Ida Russell getting up behind her father, so as to be ready for flight or other action, in case the approaching footsteps should prove to be those of enemies.

The galloping horses drew nearer, and soon came in sight.

It was then speedily settled that neither flight nor fight would be necessary, as the riders were seen to be two men and a woman.

The hope was expressed that the woman might be Clara Carron, and that hope was confirmed when the keen eyes of Old Gideon recognized the gawky form of Jotham Root.

The riders seemed inclined to avoid the group at the mouth of the canyon; but the waving of handkerchiefs, with other encouraging signals and cries, caused them to abandon that intention, and they came straight on to the party that was waiting to receive them.

Clara at once recognized the Ford brothers, and was rejoiced at meeting them; but Cortez Castarra put a stop to questions and congratulations by declaring that there was no time for talking.

"We are pursued by Apaches," he said. "This young lady was their prisoner awhile ago. We got the start of them by stampeding

their horses; but they are on our track, and we must seek a place of safety."

Gid Gray in the mean time was questioning Jotham Root, who was overjoyed at finding his old friend, and from whom he extracted much information in a few minutes.

"You needn't think of going any further," spoke up the old man. "You could never reach the river, considering the cliffs you must climb down, before the Apaches would overtake you."

"I think we might," observed Castarra.

"And there is the crossing. Even if you should reach the river, they would be upon you before you could cross."

"What can we do, then?"

"This is the safest place you will find. Come up the canyon, and I will show you where and how you can keep the Apaches at a distance."

It was decided to follow the old man's advice, and he led the way up the canyon.

The party had gone but a little way when they heard voices at the spot they had just left, and knew that the Apaches were there in search of them.

One of the more daring of the pursuers came galloping up the ravine after the fugitives; but a shot from Cortez Castarra's rifle taught him to keep at a respectful distance and wait for his comrades.

Gid Gray led the way at as rapid a rate as possible for a mile or so up the canyon, until he reached a place where the walls of bare rock were only a few rods apart at the bottom, and seemed almost to come together at the top.

Here his followers were surprised at seeing what was evidently the work of human hands, and Jotham Root thought of the "improvements" of which the old man had spoken to Andrew Carron.

Across the canyon at the narrowest part was stretched a wall of rock, somewhat higher than a man's head, with an opening through the middle just wide enough to admit a man on horseback.

When the party had passed through this opening, they perceived that the canyon began to widen, at a little distance beyond the wall, and spread out into a valley of considerable breadth, within which a small stone building was visible.

This, then, was the abode of the Canyon King and his daughter—the nest from which he had endeavored to draw Frank Ford and his brother away.

It looked like the home of a hunted man, the fortress of one who felt compelled to intrench himself against the intrusion of his own kind.

The old man directed his companions to dismount, and sent Ida to bring a rifle and equipments for Jotham Root, who had been weaponless since his capture by the Apaches.

She soon returned, bringing two rifles and their accouterments, and informed Harry Ford, in answer to his wondering inquiries, that one of them was for herself.

"My daughter has learned many things which the dwellers in towns are not obliged to know," observed Old Gideon. "One of her accomplishments is the use of the rifle, and she is no slouch of a shot, I can tell you."

It was Harry Ford's opinion that if her shots with powder and lead were as effective as the glances of her eyes, she would "hit center" every time.

Ida was followed from the house by two persons, a man and a woman, who appeared to be Navajo Indians, as they were dressed in long garments of cloth, and their black hair was suffered to fall down upon their shoulders in untrimmed luxuriance.

They were both armed, and the man spoke to Gid Gray in the language of his tribe.

"There are eight fighting men of us now," said the old man, "counting my girl and the squaw, and we ought to be able, with the help of the stone wall, to beat off a pretty big squad of Apaches."

"We kin worry 'em some," observed Jotham Root.

"But I see that they are working their way up the canyon and sighting at us, and we had better attend to our defenses."

The opening in the wall was closed by means of a heavy wooden gate; but holes had been left in the rocky rampart by the builders, through which the defenders could aim and fire, and platforms of stone had been erected here and there, upon which they could mount and look over the wall if it should be necessary to do so.

Gid Gray, who naturally assumed the duties of commander of the combined forces, assigned to each person his or her position, and gave such instructions as he deemed proper.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FORTRESS UNDER FIRE.

THE moon had gone out of sight, and the gray light of dawn had not yet begun to dispel the darkness; but the Apaches could be indistinctly seen, huddled together in a black mass down the canyon.

As Castarra said, the stampeding of their stock had only had the effect of detaining them temporarily, as they had soon recovered the

horses, and it was probable that all of them, including their remaining prisoners, were then collected in sight of Gid Gray's wall of defense.

Soon they could be seen to separate and spread out toward the sides of the canyon.

They were then dismounted, and were evidently keeping close under the cliffs, concealing themselves in the darkness, availing themselves of the cover of boulders and loose rock, gradually working toward the wall, and striving to get near enough to surprise its defenders by a sudden rush.

But there were sharp eyes watching them—the eyes of men who were accustomed to day-and-night fighting, and who were versed in all the arts and maneuvers of their savage foes.

Gid Gray on one side, and Cortez Castarra on the other, saw everything that could be seen, and soon one rifle-shot, and then another, told the lurking Apaches that their plan had been penetrated.

Angered by this discovery, and perceiving that a surprise was impossible, they rushed out from their places of concealment and dashed toward the rocky rampart, yelling like fiends, and dancing frantically about with the view of distracting the aim of their adversaries.

They learned one thing by their reconnaissance—that there were more men behind the fortification than they could have expected to find there, judging by the fire that flashed from every opening in the wall of rock.

The fire was not a deadly one, owing to the difficulty of securing an aim; but a few screeches of pain told that some of the bullets had struck, and all the Apaches were glad to throw themselves on the ground and crawl back to their places of concealment.

When the darkness began to lift it could be seen that they were again huddled together, out of rifle range, apparently consulting, or preparing for some new enterprise.

As there was no immediate danger to be apprehended, the white people left their stations, and came together for the purpose of comparing notes and giving the explanations which they had not yet had time to make.

Clara recounted the interview between her two cousins, which had been suddenly terminated by the attack of the Apaches and the capture of the party, and told how she had been rescued from her captivity by Cortez Castarra.

The gallant Mexican was highly praised for his skill and intrepidity, and by none more heartily than by Frank Ford, though that young gentleman could hardly conceal his chagrin at not having been able to distinguish himself in a similar manner.

"It seems that you have had some previous acquaintance with this gentleman," he observed to Clara, after he had congratulated her upon her speedy rescue.

"With Senor Castarra?" she replied. "Oh, yes; I had the pleasure of meeting him in Santa Fe, where he was very kind to me during mother's illness and after her death. When I heard his voice, while I was a captive among those savages, I felt as if an angel had come down from heaven to help me."

Frank smiled sadly, doubtless wishing that the angel had taken his shape instead of that of the handsome Mexican, but bravely trying to crush down the envious feelings that rose in his breast.

"Senorita Carron compliments me much too highly," said the Mexican. "If anything could transform a mortal into an angel, it would be the magic of her beautiful eyes. She is pleased to give me more praise than I deserve for my small services."

"Durned if I think so," put in Jotham.

"You are also prejudiced, my young friend. It is doubtful whether I would have been able to accomplish anything, had I not been assisted by my friend and brother, Pedrillo Mocco, whose part in the affair has not yet been explained."

Castarra proceeded to give an account of the maneuvers and actions of Pedrillo in drawing off the attention of the Apaches, and transferred the credit of the exploit to his comrade so generously and in such a gentlemanly manner, that Frank Ford felt that he could not be mean enough to envy such a noble specimen of chivalrous manhood.

"But what has become of your brave comrade?" inquired the young American. "Do you not fear that he has been captured?"

"Pedrillo is not a man who can easily be captured," answered Castarra. "He had a good horse, and it is probable that he was able to mount him and get away before the Apaches could begin a pursuit."

"Where is he, do you suppose?"

"He has been cut off from us, no doubt, but will join us, I hope, as soon as it is possible to do so. And yet I must admit that I am troubled about him, as I would rather lose my right hand than lose Pedrillo."

"You did your work well, both of you," declared Gid Gray, "and it was lucky for you, Clara, that two such men were at hand to help you. But it seems to me that you were hardly reluctant enough to leave your two cousins, if you really cared for them."

"I am not sure that I ought to care for them," answered Clara.

"Perhaps you ought not. I have no doubt that the Carron cousin was a villain, and that it was his intention to take you back to Salt Lake."

"There can be no doubt of that, sir."

"As for the other, I hardly know what to think of him. As he is a De Lerdo, he can't be expected to have any friendly feelings toward his aunt's kindred, and it is hard to believe that he had a good or honest purpose in seeking you out. But he told you the truth when he said that your aunt Hannah did not go to New York after the death of her California husband. Did he also say that she was not dead?"

"I don't think he said that in so many words," answered Clara, "though he surely intimated that she was yet alive. He told me that she had never left California, and showed me a letter which he said was from her."

"She may be dead," mused the old man. "She may have died and left you her heiress. Nothing is more likely. In that view of the matter, I can guess at his object."

"You mystify me yourself, Mr. Gray," said Clara, "and I would be glad to have the mystery cleared up."

"What is the mystery, then?"

"You seemed to recognize me when you first saw me, and to show an interest in me. You call me Clara, as if you had always known me, and speak quite familiarly of my friends and my affairs. You call yourself Gideon Gray, and yet your daughter is Ida Russell, and Russell is a name well known to me; but it surely can't be possible—"

"But it is possible, if you will pardon me for interrupting you," broke in the old man. "You have seen that I know you, and Frank Ford can tell you that I recognized him and his brother as soon as I met them. I never forget a face I have once seen, no matter how much it may have changed; but it is not likely that those who knew me years ago would recognize me now."

"Did I know you then?" asked Clara.

"You may suppose from what I have said that I am an old friend of your family, and I am more than that. My full name is Gideon Gray Russell. I am your mother's brother, and Ida is your own first cousin."

This was a joyful revelation to Clara, who affectionately embraced her uncle, and overwhelmed Ida with caresses, considerably to the discomfort of Frank Ford and Cortez Castarra.

She declared that at Salt Lake she had believed that she had not a friend in the world, nor any relative besides her unnatural father; but since she had left that region she had found not only friends, but relatives in abundance, and she thought that she had great reason to be thankful.

"As you are in such a good humor," said the old man, "you had better take your happy thoughts to sleep with you, as you need rest. Go with Ida, and we will wake you if there should be any real danger."

The two girls left the wall together, and Harry Ford accompanied them to the house, glad of a chance to lie down and rest where he could be near Ida.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEGOTIATIONS IN DURESS.

ANDREW CARRON and Francisco de Lerdo were utterly cast down by the unexpected termination of their disputes.

They had lost not only Clara, but themselves also.

Each would have been willing to fight bravely and desperately for her liberty as well as for his own; but neither had an opportunity to prove his courage or desperation.

They had been so quickly surrounded and seized by the overwhelming force of their assailants, they were bound and helpless before they fairly realized what had happened.

When the Apaches had decided to remain where they were until the next morning, the male prisoners were placed where they could be watched, and their captors left them to themselves while they ate and drank and held consultations with each other.

It was natural for the captives to suppose that their fate was involved in those consultations, and that their minds should be severely exercised on that subject.

But they could do nothing but form conjectures concerning what they might expect, and those conjectures were gloomy and fruitless indeed.

Monte Bill was the first to open the subject clearly, and to make a practical and sensible suggestion.

"I say, cap'n," he remarked, addressing himself to Andrew Carron, "you kin git us out o' this scrape, if anybody kin."

"I?" replied Andrew. "I would be glad to know how. What can I do?"

"You know—if you don't, I do—that the Mormons are in cahoot with nearly all the pesky red-skins in these parts; that they want Mormon to take Injun wives; that they do all they kin think of to keep on the right side o' the reds."

"So I have heard," assented Andrew.

"You know—or ought to know—that they are allers sendin' out agents through the Injun kentry—on missions, as they call it—to make treaties and cuddle up the reds. The Injuns believe in these agents, because they make the right kind o' presents and allers do what they promise to do. You have got the gift o' the gab, cap'n and you look as if you mought be somebody, and you must help us out."

"What shall I do?" asked Andrew.

"All you've got to do is to turn out and make them Apaches believe that you are an agent and a big man among the Mormons. Then you must make promises, like the agents do, and the reds will let us off and help us on the way home."

"I believe you are right, Bill, and that reminds me that I have a paper in my pocket, which was given to me by Elder Hynes, who said that I might need help from the Indians on the way, and that the paper would enable me to get it."

"That's business," suggested Monte Bill.

"But I did not suppose it would be worth anything among people who live as far south as the Apaches."

"Nothin' like tryin'. The Mormons stretch out everywhar. Has it got a pictur' signed to it?"

"There is the figure of an animal, intended for a beaver, I should say, which was scrawled there by Elder Higley."

"That's the ticket. Old Higley is the boss of the Injun business, and they all know his totem, you bet. The Mormons have been workin' on the 'Paches lately, and I do believe we kin manage to crawl out o' this. Nothin' like tryin', anyhow."

Francisco de Lerdo interposed for the sake of speaking a word for himself.

"I think it is time, Mr. Carron," he said, "that you and I should have an understanding. It is probable that you can help me, and I am quite sure that I can fully return the favor. If we work together, our efforts will be advantageous to both."

"It is easy for you to say so now," spitefully replied Andrew, "when you find yourself in trouble, and hope that I can help you to get out of it. If you had not come up and bothered me, I might have kept clear of this scrape."

"You are surely mistaken. The Apaches were lying in wait for you, and you would have fallen into the trap just the same if I had not been within a thousand miles of you. If you will listen to me, I will show you how you can be benefited by assisting me, much more than by carrying out your original plans."

"Very well. I am listening."

"I would have told you before now, if I could have got a chance to speak to you privately, that the Senora de Lerdo, my aunt and the aunt of Miss Clara, is actually dead, though she did not die in New York, and I presume that you knew nothing about her decease."

"I think I do know something about it," interposed Andrew.

"But not all. It is also true that Miss Clara is her heiress, but on one condition, which was put in the will in accordance with the desire of my uncle, Antonio de Lerdo. The condition is that she shall marry me."

"That is news to me, anyhow."

"If she should not fulfill this condition, she is to have but a small legacy, and the vast property will be devoted to religious purposes. I have seen her, and have admired her. In truth, I love her. I believe that I can easily persuade her to become my wife, without the necessity of making known to her that condition in the will. In this you can help me, and it will pay you better to work for me than for the poverty-stricken Mormons."

"They are not so poor, though."

"If you will help me to get her free, and to take her to California, I will pay you ten thousand dollars the day she becomes my wife."

"That sounds like a liberal offer, Mr. De Lerdo, and I am glad that you have let me into your game. Clara could never be such a fool as to give up a big property because there was a husband tacked to it, even if she should object to you personally."

"I suppose my offer is more liberal than that which the Mormons made you."

"I am willing to admit that it is a good deal more liberal. If I could be sure that you are all right, I would be glad to join you."

De Lerdo showed some papers which he had caused to be prepared before leaving San Francisco, and which seemed to substantiate the statements he had just made.

Andrew examined them and was convinced that the Californian was "all right."

"This is a good thing that you offer me," he said, "and I wish I had met you and come to an understanding with you several days ago. I have no personal interest in this business, except that I would much rather see Clara married to you, than become the fourth or fifth wife of a greasy old Mormon elder. You may count me in, Mr. De Lerdo; but the first thing is to get out of this scrape."

"Jest try my little game," observed Monte Bill.

"I intend to. That was a good suggestion of yours, and I think I can add something that will improve it. You remember that old man we met at the mouth of the canyon down yonder?"

"Old Gid Gray? You bet I do!"

"The Mormons offer a reward of five thousand dollars for his head. They don't put it out publicly, of course; but it is understood that whoever will bring in proof that he has made an end of old Gid Gray, will receive that amount or its equivalent. I mean to let the Apaches know of this, and to offer to show them where they can find the man, and to tell them how to get the reward."

"You've hit it, cap'n!" exclaimed Monte Bill. "That'll be jest into tha'r hands. If they don't bite at that bait, they are welcome to raise my ha'r."

It was settled that this plan should be adopted, and the first thing necessary was to enter into communication with the Apaches.

Red Sleeve, who appeared to be the leader of the party, was informed by signs that the prisoners wished to have a talk with him, and he came up, after a consultation with the braves, and seated himself near them.

It was not an easy matter to open the conversation, as the chief understood very few words of English; but the difficulty was removed by Monte Bill, who suggested that De Lerdo should "tackle him in Spanish."

This experiment succeeded very well, as Red Sleeve, in common with many other Apaches, had caught that language from Mexican captives, and the negotiation was easily opened.

Andrew Carron showed his letter of credence from the Mormon authorities, and was rejoiced at perceiving that the chief recognized the beaver, which was the Indian signature of Agent Higley.

Red Sleeve requested that the document should be read to him, and it was translated into Spanish by Francisco, who took occasion to add to it some remarks eulogistic of the Mormon people, and of his friend Andrew Carron in particular.

The chief said that it was "good," and asked Andrew, through the interpreter, what the "Mormoney father" wanted him to do.

Andrew replied that he had been sent on a special mission by the Mormoney father to bring back a lamb that had strayed from the fold, and that the aforesaid Mormoney father would be very angry when he should learn that his messengers had been harmed or hindered by the Indians.

"Maybe so he not know," suggested Red Sleeve, his wicked black eyes twinkling as he essayed those few words of English.

This was unpleasantly suggestive, as it hinted at such an utter extermination of the captives that they would never be heard of again.

It staggered Andrew for a moment; but he went on to say that the Mormoney father was very great and very wise; that he would surely know if harm should happen to his white children, and that he would take signal vengeance upon the Apaches, besides depriving them of the great benefits which he might otherwise be induced to bestow upon them.

To this Red Sleeve replied by an incredulous grunt, and stated that the agents of the Mormoney father had had several talks with his people, and had promised to aid them in many ways, if they would agree to keep the peace; but they had not as yet received anything from the father aforesaid.

Andrew explained through the interpreter, that he was commissioned to offer the Pinal Apaches certain presents of arms and other valuables, which would be delivered to them at such times and places as they might name, on condition that they should keep the peace toward the Mormons, and molest none of them who might be traveling through their country.

The chief answered that this was very good talk, but five white captives, including a young and beautiful woman, were better than fine words and promises.

He would, however, report to the warriors, what the Mormoney man had said, and would be governed by their opinions.

Andrew then requested the interpreter to open the subject of Gid Gray, and the reward that would be paid for his death, and Francisco proceeded to offer that bait to the chief.

To the surprise of the white man Red Sleeve pricked up his ears when the name of Gid Gray was mentioned, and listened eagerly to what was said.

It was soon evident that he understood the value of five thousand dollars, and that he knew how much powder and lead, with blankets and other necessities, he could procure for that sum.

It was also evident that he was anxious to secure the reward, and that this was not the first time he had heard of it.

In fact, he admitted that it had previously been mentioned to him by a Mormon agent, and that his visit to the North had actually been made for the purpose of killing Old Gideon and claiming the reward.

This made matters plain between the Apache and his captives.

He was glad to learn that Andrew could take

him to the hiding-place of Gid Gray, and promised to lay the question before his warriors, whose decision, he was quite sure, would be favorable to the captives.

A grand consultation among the Apaches ensued, and at its close the chief came and told the prisoners that the warriors had listened approvingly to what he had told them, and would render a decision on the subject in the morning.

This intelligence was so cheering to Andrew Carron and his companions, that they thought they might lie down to a sound sleep, if not to pleasant dreams.

Before morning, however, their calculations were thrown out of gear by the disturbance that followed the maneuvers of Pedrillo Mocco on the other side of the gorge, and by the subsequent stampede of the stock and the escape of Clara Carron and Jotham Root.

The white men were greatly astonished at these developments, and wondered who could have been so bold and skillful as to attempt and accomplish such an unexpected rescue.

They could think of no one but Gid Gray, but kept their thoughts to themselves, as it might be bad policy to express them in the presence of the Apaches.

When Red Sleeve came to them again, and ordered them to mount and ride, Francisco de Lerdo asked him about the rescue.

The chief answered that he believed the work had been done under the direction of a Mexican enemy of the Apaches who was known as The Whip, as it was certain that the disturbance in the gorge was caused by one of his most trusty followers, and it was supposed that The Whip could not be far away.

This intelligence was puzzling to Andrew Carron and his companions, and they were quite disheartened when they were informed that they must be bound upon their horses.

When they remonstrated against this indignity, the chief told them that their case had not yet been settled by the warriors, the decision having been prevented by the unexpected events which they had just witnessed, and that they must in the mean time be held as prisoners.

So they were marched away, guarded by a small squad of Apaches, the rest having recovered their horses and gone in pursuit of the fugitives.

CHAPTER XX.

PEDRILLO'S PERIL.

THE most important agent in the rescue of Clara Carron, as has been seen, was Pedrillo Mocco, who had also improved the occasion by taking deadly vengeance upon the sub-chief Picoto, against whom he had a bitter personal grudge.

When he had emptied all the chambers of his revolver at his enemies, and the Apaches had started to rush upon him in a body, he knew that he had done all he could do to aid his leader, and that the time had come to seek safety in flight.

So he dodged down behind the rocks, in which cover and in the shadow of the cliff he made his way as rapidly as possible toward the place where he had concealed his horse.

The rush of the Apaches was checked by the stampeding of their horses and the escape of two of their prisoners, and but a few of them were left to continue the search for Pedrillo.

Those few men were in no hurry to come to close quarters with such a formidable foe, and they used more caution than courage until they discovered that he was in full retreat.

Pedrillo's plans, in the mean time, had not turned out as well as he expected them to, and he had nearly come to grief because of the difficulty he experienced in finding his horse.

That unlucky animal, not having been hitched to anything, had been frightened by the firing and yelling, and had indulged in a little stampede of his own.

He had not gone far, however, and Pedrillo, after stumbling about in the darkness and cursing his ill-fortune, finally came upon him near the base of the cliff, and was glad enough to mount him.

The delay had nearly been fatal to the rider, as several bullets whistled about him as he galloped away, one of which struck him in the leg, inflicting a slight flesh wound.

It had proved quite fatal to one part of his plan, which was to ride on and overtake Cortez Castarra before the Apache pursuit could be fairly begun.

A quick glance which he cast over the plain as he rode away told him that this would now be impossible, as Castarra and his companions were then at a considerable distance from the gorge, and between him and them were a dozen or more of the Apaches who had recovered their horses, riding furiously in pursuit.

As it was impossible to rejoin his leader, he had nothing to think of but his own safety, which then demanded his immediate attention, as other Apaches, as fast as they could secure their horses, were setting out in pursuit of him.

But this gave Pedrillo no uneasiness, as he was mounted on an excellent horse, whose speed he

had often tested, and he had no doubt of his ability to leave the Apaches in the distance.

He then rode toward the south at an easy gait, until his pursuers had nearly come within range of him, when he put spurs to his horse and got away from them so swiftly as to dishearten them.

When he had played this game twice the Apaches tired of it, and they turned back to rejoin their comrades who had gone in pursuit of the escaped prisoners.

Pedrillo then pursued his course quite leisurely, thinking sadly of his separation from his dear friend and leader, and wondering when and how he would ever meet him again.

Daylight found him still on the sandy plain, moving slowly southward, and in a region that was seamed with narrow and very deep ravines, running in a westerly direction.

He was obliged to turn out of his course to avoid these ravines, until he nearly reached the base of the cliff which formed the step to the higher plateau.

He then began to feel the need of water, and sought for it without success at places where his experience told him he would be likely to find it.

During his search he came across the trail of a shod horse, which was quite fresh, and which convinced him that a white man was not far distant.

Pedrillo then proceeded quite cautiously, as even a white man in that region needed to be treated as an enemy until he should prove himself a friend, but hoping that he might find some person who would be both a companion and an aid to him.

As he was following the trail to a large rock, in the shadow of which he hoped to find a water hole, he was startled by a hail and an order to halt.

At the same time a man with a leveled rifle stepped out from behind the rock.

Pedrillo easily satisfied the stranger that he was a friend to white people, and the latter showed him a pool of water, at which he and his horse drank heartily, though it was warm and slimy.

"Tain't often," said the stranger, "that two lone men come together in these parts, like we have."

"That is true," replied Pedrillo. "White men are generally wise enough to hunt in couples. But I have been separated from my friends."

"That's what's the matter with me, and I'm glad to meet you."

Pedrillo sat down, and began to wash and bind up his wound, which had been giving him a little trouble, and this aroused the curiosity of the stranger.

"Pears like you've been in some sort of a skrimmage," he said. "Is that ar' a gunshot wound?"

"Yes; it was made by an Apache bullet."

"Pache? Them's the chaps I got away from yesterday, when the rest o' my party was gobbled up. Reckon you must ha' fell in with the same lot."

"It was the same, if you are one of those who were attacked by the Apaches at the mouth of the gorge up yonder. My partner and I were watching you as you came across the plain."

"You don't say!"

"We knew that the Apaches were lying in wait for you, but were unable to warn or to help you. But we did something last night."

"What was that?"

"There was a young lady in one of the parties, and my friend knew her. He had seen her before, and he loved her. He determined to rescue her from the Indians, and told me what to do to help him. I attracted their attention, and stirred them up with a very sharp stick. Indeed, I rubbed out two of them, and hurt some others pretty badly."

"You did? Gimme yer fist, old boy! Durned if I ain't glad I come across ye! 'Stonishin', too, that a Greaser kin be sech a brick. What did yer pardner do?"

"My friend stampeded the stock of the Apaches, and got away with the young lady, and I think with one other captive. I would have joined him then, but my horse had got loose, and I did not find him until the Apaches had cut me off."

"It was 'nation well done, anyhow. Who is your friend?"

"His name is Cortez Castarra, and in the South he is know as The Whip."

"I've heard of him. Wonderful that a Greaser kin come out in that style. What is your name, my friend?"

"Pedrillo Mocco."

"Pedreoyo—that sounds Greaserish enough, fur sartin', and I'll cut off t'other eend if you don't object. My name is Perry Wessel, and I belonged to the second party you saw crossin' the plain. I am powerful glad that the gal has got out o' the scrape, as she was a sweet critter, and I felt sorry for her."

"No doubt you did."

"I had my fears as to whether my boss and t'other chap meant to do the fa'r thing by her. T'other chap couldn't ha' meant fa'r, as he was a Mormon, and I don't believe that my boss

would do to bet on all the time, either. Reckon thar'd ha' been trouble, anyhow, if the 'Paches hadn't lit down onto us. I mought ha' made some fur fly, myself, if the reds hadn't laid out my pardner, Jim Bond. That kinder diskeridged me."

"That cannot now be helped. The question is, what shall be done? For my part, I am anxious to join my friend, Senor Castarra."

"I'm with you thar, if you'll take me as a pardner. How about that hurt o' yours? Is it bad?"

"It is nothing. A little sore, but not worth speaking of. If you will go with me, we will take as much water as we can carry, and we'll start at once."

After a meager meal of the dried meat and hard bread which they carried in their provision sacks, the new comrades filled their canteens, examined their weapons, tightened their riding gear, and rode away toward the north, to take up the trail of the Apaches.

As has been noticed, they were in a region that was seamed by deep and narrow ravines running toward the west.

These cut into sections the vast sandy desert, which was bounded on one side by the cliff from whose verge Castarra and Pedrillo had looked down upon the plain, and on the other, at the distance of ten or twelve miles, by another gigantic step which led to a still lower plateau.

The riders were obliged to make detours to avoid these canyons, and on one occasion found themselves between two of them, in a *cul de sac* from which it would be difficult to extricate themselves in case the opening should be barred.

"We had better keep more to the east'ard, Pedreoyo," remarked Perry Wessel. "Thar's no tellin' what mought happen, and we'd be in a bad fix if any inemies should ketch sight of us while we are tangled up in these cussed canyons."

"You speak truly, my friend, and I wish our wisdom had come to us sooner. For see! there is a band of Indians coming toward us from the south, and we must ride our best to get out of their way."

It was as Pedrillo had said. A large force of mounted Indians was plainly in sight, and the only wonder was that they had not been seen before.

They had caught sight of the white men, and were galloping toward them at a rapid rate.

It was useless for Pedrillo and his comrade to speculate on what might have been.

They could only put spurs to their horses and endeavor to get away from between the canyons before their enemies could come within range.

To their great surprise and consternation, this way of escape was soon closed to them by another body of Indians, who came out from under the cliff at the north, riding down toward them, and cutting them off in that direction.

These two movements inclosed them between the two canyons, and they could do nothing but turn their horses and ride in the opposite direction, though no chance for escape could be seen in that quarter.

"We are picked up, Pedreoyo," said Perry Wessel. "This is as bad a fix as I keer to git into, and I don't see the least show to crawl out of it."

"There is no other chance than this, my friend. Unless we can get down into one of these canyons, the Indians will have us. But we must never despair until we are dead."

"What sort of Injuns do you make 'em out to be, anyhow?"

"They are Apaches, I believe."

"That's how I put it up, and what in thunder sech a gang o' 'Paches is doin' up in this kentry is the thing that gits me."

"It is very strange, indeed; but it is enough for us to know that they are here. Let us ride nearer to the canyon, my friend, and ride a little faster."

The two parties of Indians soon came together, and rode on at full speed.

Their game seemed to be sure, and the pursuit was a race between them to decide which party should secure the coveted scalps.

It was evident that they were gaining on the white men, who were not pushing their horses, as they were obliged to look for some means of exit from their perilous predicament.

As every step that carried them away from one danger only brought them nearer to another, they had no special inducement to rapid riding.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.

THE canyon near which Pedrillo and his companion were riding was quite broad toward the head, but narrowed rapidly as they went westward.

As it had been made by the action of water on the sand rock during an unknown series of years or ages, it was merely a deep depression in the ground, such as could not even be discovered except upon a close approach.

The Mexican watched it closely as he rode along, and suddenly halted when he came to the narrowest part.

"If we are to find any chance of escape, it is here," said he.

Perry Wessel said nothing, but stared as if he thought that the chance of escape in that quarter was not worth looking for.

Pedrillo dismounted, looked down into the canyon, and shook his head.

Then he ran on to where a sharp spur of rock projected out from the edge of the ravine, and knelt down and looked over again.

He leaped up with a joyful cry, ran to his horse, and took the lariat from the saddle-bow.

"This is our chance," he said. "Jump down, my friend, and follow me."

The Apaches were still galloping toward them at full speed, yelling triumphantly, in the firm belief that they had driven their prey into a corner.

Pedrillo threw the noose of his lariat over the projecting spur of rock, and pulled it tight.

He then dropped the loose end down into the ravine, and beckoned to his companion.

"Come, my friend! Bring your lariat, and sling your gun over your shoulder, and follow me."

"Do you mean to go down thar?"

"Yes."

"And leave our hosses?"

"Could we take them with us?"

"We mought as well be dead as to lose our hosses."

"We will soon be dead if we do not leave them. Come, or you will be too late. See! I am going now."

The Mexican let himself over the edge of the ravine, and went out of sight; but the stout hide-rope held firmly to the point of rock, and its vibrations showed that he was descending.

Perry Wessel looked down into the canyon, then back at the Apaches, who were rapidly nearing him, and hesitated no longer.

He slung his rifle over his shoulder, coiled his lariat around his waist, and followed his comrade.

Pedrillo had let himself down nearly to the length of the lariat, and had then swung himself in under the overhanging rock to a narrow shelf which he had noticed when he looked over the edge of the ravine.

In a few moments Perry Wessel stood on the shelf at his side.

They were thus out of reach of the Apaches, whose yells of rage could plainly be heard when they perceived the disappearance of their expected victims.

"Is this not better than death?" demanded Pedrillo.

"Reckon it is. We're safe enough now, though I'm afeard that we've only jumped out o' the fryin'-pan into the fire."

"We must let the fire take care of itself, and be thankful that we are out of the pan. We are safe enough unless the Indians come down to us."

"How could they do that?"

Pedrillo pointed to the lariat, and then he shook it, trying to throw it loose from the rock above; but it held firmly, and was not to be shaken off.

"That ain't wuth while," remarked the other. "No Injuns are goin' to be crazy enough to try to climb down that rope."

"I am not sure; but we will soon see. They are above us now, and are very angry."

The Apaches had reached the place where the horses had been abandoned, and had taken possession of them; but this did not satisfy their desires, and they loudly expressed their disgust and indignation at the manner in which the white men had slipped away from them.

Those white men, in the mean time, had unslung their rifles, and were ready for any emergency, though it could hardly be expected that their enemies would attempt to descend.

From the shelter of the overhanging rock they cautiously looked up, and saw two or three dark heads thrust out over the edge of the ravine and instantly withdrawn.

"Mought ha' picked one off easy enough," remarked Wessel; "but I reckon it wouldn't pay."

"Hush! They have not seen us, and are coming down. Sh! there is one already on the rope."

It was true. The Apaches, maddened by the loss of their victims, and not being able to see where they had taken refuge, had determined to pursue them as far as possible, and the only trail led down the lariat.

One daring warrior had already let himself over the edge of the cliff, and another was preparing to follow him.

"I'll fix him, sure," muttered Perry Wessel as he raised his rifle.

"Better let him come down," suggested Pedrillo, "and my knife will stop him here."

"Tain't wuth while to run any resks, Pedreoyo. That chap is my meat."

As Wessel spoke his rifle cracked, and the blood of the man on the rope spurted down upon the rocks at their feet.

After clinging convulsively to the lariat a few seconds, the Apache fell, touching the edge of the shelf on which the white men were standing, and glancing off, down into the depths of the canyon.

"The fall would ha' killed him, as the Irishman said about the squir'l," observed Wessel. "Any more comin', Pedreeyo?"

There were no more coming. The fatal failure of the first warrior had satisfied the Apaches, and the second man who started to descend was quickly drawn up by his comrades, whose yells of rage told loudly of the fury that filled their hearts.

Pedrillo again shook the lariat; but his efforts to throw the noose off from the point of rock above were quite ineffectual.

"Better make the end fast," suggested his comrades. "Mebbe the reds will cut it above thar."

"I wish they would; but we will have no such good luck. We need not think of going back up yonder, my friend, and we must get the rope down here, as we will be sure to need it. But that is easier to say than to do."

"Thar's only one way to do the job, Pedreeyo. If I can't shoot that lariat off from thar, I ain't so good a shot as I think I am."

Pedrillo looked incredulous, but held the loose end of the lariat while his companion carefully loaded his rifle and sighted along the barrel, aiming to cut the rope where it lay tightly against the stone.

The rifle cracked, and the lead spattered against the rock.

"I hit it," cried Wessel. "Give her a sharp jerk, Pedreeyo, and p'raps you'll fetch her."

Pedrillo gave the lariat a quick and powerful pull, and down it came, amid the yells of the Apaches.

An examination showed that it had been nearly severed by Wessel's bullet.

The comrades then walked a little distance along the ledge, to a place where the shelf was wider, and where the overhanging rock more fully sheltered them from the observation of the Apaches.

There they sat down to rest and to consider what should next be done.

The shelf ran no further in that direction, and they were shut off from the view down the canyon by a projecting wall of rock.

As they could not expect to return to the plain, there was no way of exit from their present position, except by descending to the bottom of the canyon, and the possibility of the descent was the problem they had to solve.

Pedrillo, who had thus far led the way, set himself at work to examine the situation.

Looking over the edge of the shelf, he saw another narrow ledge at a considerable distance below, which seemed to run steeply down the face of the cliff.

If they could reach this, they might be able to get to the bottom of the canyon.

There was but one chance—to knot together the two lariats.

This was done, and one end was securely made fast, as near the edge of the shelf as possible; but the loose end, when it was let down, lacked several yards of reaching the ledge.

Pedrillo drew it up, and tied on the worsted sash which he wore around his waist.

This helped the matter considerably; but the rope did not yet reach the ledge.

"I shall go down," said Pedrillo, who had measured the distance with his eye and calculated the drop which he would be obliged to make.

"You'll be likely to go down furdern you want to," suggested his comrade. "If you try to drop from the end o' the rope, you'll be sure to slip off the rock when you strike."

"I think not. I have done more difficult work than that, and I am very sure-footed."

"And what will I do, Pedreeyo?"

"You will follow me, I hope."

"I ain't no circus man, myself, and I wouldn't like to resk sech a jump as that."

"But I will be there. If you slip, I will catch you."

"I know you will if you kin, and I do believe you kin. Go your length, Pedreeyo, and I'll see how you make the raffle. It's better'n gittin' rubbed out by the 'Paches, anyhow."

Pedrillo let himself over the edge of the shelf, and slid down the rope until he reached the end of the sash, when he was still more than a man's height from the sharp and narrow ledge.

He stopped there until his weight steadied the line, and then let go.

As his feet struck, he wavered and balanced himself for a few seconds, and finally inclined toward the cliff, where he was safe.

Perry Wessel then essayed the descent, and dropped as his comrade had; but his agility was not equal to that of the other, and he would have slipped off and fallen down into the canyon, if he had not been caught and held by Pedrillo, who had braced himself for the effort.

"It was a close shave," said Wessel with a shiver. "But we are out o' the reach o' them cussed 'Paches, though I don't know as we are much better off. We mought as well be nowhar as be set afoot in this style."

"Have you used your eyes?" replied Pedrillo. "If you will look about, you will see something."

Wessel did look about, and he saw something that surprised him into exclamations of joy and astonishment.

From the point which they had reached they could see both up and down the canyon.

Above them, down in the canyon, was a pleasant little valley, with patches of grass and cultivated ground.

At the foot of the opposite cliff was a small stone house, in the door of which a woman was standing and looking up at them.

Further down the canyon was a wall of stone at the narrowest part, and behind it were several persons who appeared to be white men.

Still further down they could descry a number of people scattered about the canyon, whom they judged to be Indians.

Near the stone house was a white man, who was looking up at them and making signals to them.

"That's the very gal!" exclaimed Wessel. "Them's our folks, and yonder the 'Paches. Durned if we ain't in luck, Pedreeyo."

"You are right, my friend. Those are our people, and we have only to go down and join them. But we must first try to get our lariats. I would be sorry to lose those faithful friends."

Perry Wessel again essayed to bring down the ropes by shooting at the noose; but the distance was considerably greater than when he made his previous effort, and his nerves were disordered by his perilous descent and by the joyful surprise he had received.

Each of the marksmen fired several shots before they succeeded in cutting the noose and bringing down the lariats.

Then they carefully worked their way down the sloping ledge, and finally reached the bottom of the canyon, where they were joyfully greeted by the white people who had assembled to meet them.

CHAPTER XXII.

GID GRAY'S STORY.

AFTER the Apaches under Red Sleeve had made their reconnaissance of Gid Gray's fortress, they were satisfied to rest and remain quiet during a considerable length of time, as they could not see their way clear to make an impression upon that stone wall and the man who guarded it.

The white men fell into conversation, and Frank Ford found the opportunity a good one to ask Gid Gray why he had settled and fortified himself in that wilderness.

"I will tell you all about it," answered the old man. "As we are all in the same boat here, it is right that we should know and understand each other."

"I only put the question as a matter of curiosity," observed Frank.

"But your curiosity is justifiable. When I have told my story, you can draw off and leave me if you want to."

"It is not likely that we will want to; but I do want to hear your story. We must do something to pass the time while our red friends down yonder are waiting for our scalps."

"Long may they wait! I hope that you will not also want my scalp when I tell you that a reward of five thousand dollars is offered for my head."

"It is a great temptation; but I hope we can withstand it. If you will tell me how and why your head became so valuable, we will try and resist the desire to cut it off."

"I believe you never saw my wife, Frank," began the old man. "If you had seen her, you would probably not remember her now. But she was a beautiful woman, and as good as she was beautiful. She was many years younger than I was when she married me; but she loved me, and we lived together very happily."

"I went to Salt Lake because I wanted to get rich. I believed that there was something worth looking for in those mountains of Utah, and I hoped to make a fortune there."

"I knew little about the Mormons then, and supposed that there was nothing out of the way connected with them, except their polygamy and their strange religious notions."

"They were generally hostile to the Gentiles, as they call everybody outside of their church; but I believed that I and my little family could live among them as safely as elsewhere."

"I was not prepared, therefore, for the meanness and villainy, the oppression and crime, of which I afterward found them capable."

"Leaving my wife and children in a little house that I had rented, I went on a prospecting tour through the Wahsatch Mountains."

"I expected to be absent several weeks; but it was long after the time I had set for my return when I got back in the neighborhood of Salt Lake."

"The reason was that I had been attacked and captured by the Indians."

"I learned afterward that the Mormons were opposed to having the mines developed, for fear that their country would be overrun by the Gentiles, and that they had put the Indians on my track, so as to make an end of my prospecting."

"They also had another object, which was plain enough to me after awhile."

"The truth was that one of their chief men—

the same Elder Hynes who wanted to add Clara Carron to his stock of wives—had taken a fancy to my wife, and meant to make her his."

"He could not do this, even under their dispensations and revelations, while I was living, and it became necessary to get me out of the way."

"He had reason to suppose that his object was accomplished, as I did not return, and the report came to Salt Lake that I had been killed."

"The Mormons believed that, no doubt, as they had good reason to, and hastened to carry it to my wife."

"It was hard for her to believe such a cruel report, and she fought against it as long as she could; but I did not return, and her necessities became great."

"Elder Hynes comforted her and helped her, and she began to consider him a true friend."

"But his real character came out at last, when he proposed to her that she should become his wife, and she firmly refused the offer."

"Again he applied to her, and she repulsed him with disdain and scorn."

"There followed a series of persecutions, with the details of which I am not acquainted; but I know that her troubles were sufficient to lay her on a bed of sickness."

"While she was in this condition she was taken from her home at night, and was carried to Elder Hynes's residence, where the ceremony of sealing, as they call their marriage, was privately performed, of course against her will."

"After that she was a prisoner; but she finally recovered her strength, and made her escape, with the help of one of Hynes's earlier wives."

"She was so anxious to get away from that man and that place, that she even left her child behind, and pushed out toward the hills, not knowing whither she was going or what was to become of her, except that every feeble step was taking her further from Salt Lake."

"By a most wonderful providence I met her as she was coming into the mountains. I had escaped from the Indians, and was hastening home to my wife and child."

"In a few words she told me what had happened, and I was so frantic with grief and rage that I did not know what to do."

"I was forced into action almost immediately."

"Hynes had discovered my wife's escape, and had sent four men in pursuit of her."

"They came up with her as she was telling me her pitiful story, and a bloody contest ensued."

"I fought the four men, and killed two of them, and the others ran away."

"But one of their shots had struck my wife, and she was dead on the ground."

"All her troubles were ended, and I could do nothing for her—nothing but swear vengeance on the wretches who had taken her life and ruined our happiness."

"I was even obliged to leave her unburied for a time, and to hasten to Salt Lake, where I got possession of my child, and I fled with her until I was out of the reach of the Mormons."

"It was then that they denounced me as a murderer, outlawed me, and offered a reward for my head."

"Twice they hunted me down, and tried to earn the reward; but each party came to grief."

"I have hunted them, too, and have kept my oath of vengeance, so far, by taking the lives of the two men who escaped me when my wife was murdered."

"I am not done with them yet, and they are not done with me."

"The reward is still standing, and I have reason to believe that they have been trying to persuade the Indians to kill me. But you see that I am alive, and I hope to make it bitter for some of them yet."

"Now you know why I am here in the wilderness, and why I have built this little fortification. If you object to the society of such a man as I am, we will part."

"My dear sir," replied Frank Ford, "you have my heartfelt sympathy. You may rely upon my assistance to any possible extent, and I am sure that Senor Castarra will say as much for himself."

"That I will," said the Mexican. "We are also glad to have the help of our friend Gray, and to have found his little fortification here. But it appears to me that the Apaches are claiming our attention just now. I hardly know what they would be at."

The Apaches, tired of inaction, and convinced that it would be impossible for them to carry the wall by a rush, were attempting some sort of strategy, the nature of which, as Castarra had said, was not yet exactly evident.

A close inspection of their maneuvers, however, satisfied the white men that they were endeavoring to secure positions high up the cliffs, on each side of the canyon, from which they could fire down at the men behind the wall.

Some of them had already picked their way up the rock, and were gradually working toward the fortification.

A few judicious rifle shots, one of which tumbled an Apache from his perch, had the effect of teaching them caution, and the white men were

convinced that their efforts in that direction were not really to be feared.

Frank Ford, who had not entirely satisfied his curiosity concerning the affairs of Gid Gray, took advantage of another interval of quiet to ask the old man some more questions.

He asked them in the interest of his brother, who had undoubtedly fallen in love with Ida.

"I fail to see," said Frank, "why you should persist in remaining in this wilderness. Your daughter is growing up, and is shut out from the influences of education and society, and you are, as you say, continually exposed to danger here."

"That is true," answered the old man. "I ought to leave this country and quit this sort of life, for Ida's sake; but I am not through with those wretches who murdered my wife. I have four of them notched on my gun; but they were only tools. The leader, the man who set them on, who was the author and contriver of all the devilry, has not yet been struck, and I have sworn to add his number to the notches. And that is not all."

"It ought to be enough, I think."

"But there is more. I hate those Mormons, as I have reason to, with a deep and deadly hatred, and that hatred will let me lose no chance of doing them all the harm in my power. It is one of their pet projects to get their people mixed with the Indians, and to gain an influence over the tribes, so that they may rely upon them as allies in case of trouble."

"Need you interest yourself in that?"

"I think so. I have been working to defeat that influence, and have succeeded very well, but have not done all that I have planned to do. I have made application for the position of Indian Agent for the Navajoes, and hope to get it. I will get it, unless the Government means to favor the Mormons, and when I do I will make it warm for some of them."

"Is all this worth while?" asked Frank.

"When you speak of your revenge, I can easily understand that you want to carry it out; but this other matter is a work of years, and it seems to me that the game is hardly worth the candle. If you will pardon me for speaking plainly, I think that you are not doing justice to your daughter in remaining here for that purpose."

"I have another purpose," replied Gid Gray, "one which closely concerns her."

"What is that?"

"I came to Utah, as I told you, with the idea of getting rich. The Wahsatch mountains are full of silver, as will be abundantly proved before long. The Mormons can no more hinder the development of the mines than they can prevent the sun from rising. I have found silver there, and have located a claim which will be very valuable. When the mining excitement sets in, as it must before long, I will sell my claim if I am not able to work it, and I hope it will prove a fortune for Ida."

"Suppose you should die in the mean time?"

"The claim is properly and legally located, and I have two descriptions of it by which it can be found. One of them I carry, and the other is in Ida's possession."

"I am glad to hear that, though I cannot see why it should be necessary for you to remain in this place. What did you say, Senor Castarra?"

This question was called out by an exclamation from the Mexican, who was looking eagerly at something which Jotham Root was pointing out to him, down the canyon.

It appeared that the youth had discovered three white men in the camp of the Apaches, and had at once pronounced them to be those in whose company he and Clara Carron were taken prisoners. He had pointed them out to Cortez Castarra, whose opinion, upon a close inspection, coincided with his own.

Gid Gray also declared that two of them had been in the party which passed the night at the mouth of that canyon.

"But they are free," suggested Frank Ford.

"They are not bound, and are going about as they please. The Apaches are not accustomed to treat prisoners in that style."

"It is strange," answered the old man. "I can't account for it, unless they have contrived to buy over the Indians, or have persuaded them to come and hunt for my scalp."

"Either supposition is possible," observed the Mexican, "though both are quite unusual and unexpected. Only one thing is clear to my mind—that neither of those young men meant well by Miss Carron. But hark! Was not that a rifle-shot?"

It was the faint report of a rifle-shot, seeming to proceed from somewhere up the canyon.

All looked in that direction; but they could see nothing, and the sound was not repeated.

The fact remained that a rifle-shot had been fired, and that fact caused a great deal of conjecture.

"Perhaps it is my friend, Pedrillo Mocco," observed the Mexican. "I will go and see."

"My brother is up that way," suggested Frank.

"But he does not know Pedrillo and his ways. That shot may have been a signal, and my comrade may need help."

CHAPTER XXIII.

COUSINLY CONFIDENCES.

CLARA CARRON and Ida Russell went to the stone house, ostensibly for the purpose of sleeping; but it must be admitted that they did not carry out that intention to any great extent.

Harry Ford, who had accompanied them, wrapped himself in the precious blanket which had lately enfolded the fair form of Ida, and laid down to pleasant dreams, and found them, greatly to the content of his mind and his body.

The girls, however, as is usually the case with girls, had "ever so much to say" to each other, and it was absolutely necessary that both should tell all they knew before they could close their eyes in sleep.

Clara's attention was first attracted by the house and its furniture.

The building was small and rudely constructed, and there was but one room, and the floor was of earth.

There was no furniture to speak of—nothing but some couches and rough seats and a table, made of the poor and scanty timbers of the canyon.

But the skins of fur-bearing animals, and of large and fine-plumaged birds, were there in abundance, and gave the place an air of comfort, if not an appearance of barbaric luxury.

There were many little articles, too, scattered about the walls and elsewhere, fancifully wrought of feathers, quills and bright-colored stones, which showed that Ida had not been at a loss for employment in her leisure hours.

Clara noted all these things, with a few words of comment; but it was not upon their surroundings that the pent-up emotions of those two young women could exhaust themselves.

They chose the finest puma robe and the softest couch, not for the sake of rest, but for greater convenience in looking into each other's hearts and talking to their souls' content.

They had so much to talk about that it did not seem possible ever to get through with it.

In the first place, their cousinship was something new and wonderful to them, and it had to be enlarged upon and rejoiced over.

Then their singular meeting, there in the wilderness, far from the habitations of their own people, would have furnished a theme for an ocean of talk if they had not shut the sluice-gate upon it.

The history of each, quite unknown to the other up to that time, must of necessity be told; and there were their recent adventures, the people they had met, and their prospects for the future, all coming up for discussion.

It was no wonder that the girls could not think of sleep.

If they had attempted to say the half of what they wanted to say, a day would not have sufficed them.

As it was, they could only touch lightly, now upon one subject and then upon another, putting forth scattered bits of information which each hearer might patch together at her convenience.

After a while their talk, as girl's talk will, became personal rather than general, dwelling upon people instead of facts, and they discussed, as it was natural they should, the men about them, and the young men in particular.

Ida had noticed how longingly both Frank Ford and Cortez Castarra had gazed at Clara, and she had no difficulty in interpreting the meaning of their glance.

Her only doubt lay in the fact that she was quite unable to determine which of the self-evident lovers was honored by her cousin's preferences.

"Which of them do you like the best, dear?" she smilingly inquired.

"Which what? Which who?" replied the oblivious, but blushing Clara.

"Which of those two nice, handsome young gentlemen? They are both in love with you, I am sure, and you have but to make your choice between them."

"I don't know why they should be in love with me. I have known one of them but a little while, and the other I had not seen for several years until I met him here."

"But they do love you. Any one can see that. Nobody ever loved me; but I understand. And I do believe that both of them have come ever and ever so many miles to find you. Only think of that!"

"That is absurd," protested Clara.

"Not a bit of it. I wish somebody would come and find me. They are both so handsome, too, that it is hard to choose between them. The Mexican, with his dark eyes and hair, and his strange looks and ways, is perfectly splendid, and he saved you from the Indians, Clara."

"I ought to be very thankful to him, and I am," answered Clara.

"Thankful? You ought to be thankful that he loves you. That is a great deal to be thankful for, I am sure. I don't know but the other is the handsomest, after all, with his blue eyes and light hair and clear complexion and gentlemanly ways, and you knew him long before you saw the Mexican."

"I have known him since I was a child."

"Tell me the truth, then, and say that he has already told you that he loves you."

"He has never said so much in words," hesitatingly replied Clara; "but I used to think—"

"There it is! I knew it. He loves you, and it is easy to see that the Mexican loves you, as he tells his love in every look. How happy you ought to be, Clara, with two such lovers! If I had one, I would be supremely satisfied."

"Indeed! It seems to me that you have one."

"Who? I? A lover? And who may that be?"

"Harry Ford. If he has not fallen in love with you, he has no business to show the symptoms so plainly."

"Do you really think so, Clara? Does he show the symptoms? If I could only believe it, I would be so glad and happy!"

"He saved you from a great injury, if not from death."

"It was his brother who thought of holding out the blanket to catch me; but he could have done nothing without the other—could he?"

Clara was sure that he could not.

"And I noticed that he took that blanket from his brother, giving his own in exchange for it. He let me have it to wrap in last night, and has since been as careful of it as if it were something precious."

"That is a symptom, surely."

"And he does look at me so often, Clara, and so strangely. Perhaps he loves me, and I am not ashamed to say that I hope he does."

"Could you love him, Ida?"

"Could I? Why, I do!"

"I believe that he loves you, and I wish you joy. But we ought not to be talking of such matters, my dear."

"Why not?"

"Because we are not out of the woods yet, as Jotham Root would say, and there is danger for those we have been speaking of, as well as for ourselves. Listen to the firing! I believe the Indians have made another attack."

The firing ceased after a little while, and the girls continued their confidential talk, until they were startled by the report of a rifle-shot near at hand.

"What was that?" demanded Ida.

"It was a shot," answered Clara. "That is clear enough; but I don't know where it came from, or what it means. Let us go and wake Harry."

They found Harry Ford already awake, with his precious blanket rolled up and strapped.

He, too, had heard the shot, and was looking about to ascertain where it had come from, but had not been able to discover anything.

"I hope there is no new danger threatening us," observed Ida.

"I hope so," answered Harry; "but I can't account for that shot. It was not fired by any of our friends below. I was going to walk up the canyon and look about."

"Let me go with you," entreated Ida, and she laid her hand upon her rifle, which was leaning against the wall.

"There may be danger," he objected.

"Will there not be danger for you, as well as for me? I can use my rifle, and I may be a help to you."

Harry muttered something about being willing to face any danger for her sake, and she went up the canyon with him, leaving her cousin standing in the door of the little stone house.

Clara was not long left alone, as Cortez Castarra soon came up from below.

He had come to inquire into the meaning of that rifle-shot, he said, but was not able to pass such a vision of loveliness without stopping to admire it.

"I hope you have rested well, senorita," he said, without pausing for her blushing reply to his compliment.

"I am obliged to confess that I have not rested at all," answered Clara. "My cousin and I have found so much to say to each other that we have not thought of sleep."

"But you must think of sleep, if you will allow me to insist. There may be great dangers and hardships before us yet, and you will need all your strength and courage. You must not forget that your life and health are very precious. You were so precious to me that I have come all the way from El Paso with the one purpose of seeking you, and I esteem it a great blessing that I have been permitted to find you and to come to your assistance when you needed help."

"I did not know that you had come so far to seek me."

"Nothing can be more true, Miss Clara. Your image made such an impression upon my heart, when you were in Santa Fe, that nothing has been able to efface it, and I felt that life would be worth less than nothing to me until I could see you again."

"You have always been very kind to me, and I have much to thank you for," she said, with her eyes cast down, and her face glowing with a conscious blush.

"I must beg you to be kind to yourself, Miss Clara, and I know that you must have sleep, to strengthen you for the trials that may be to come."

"Do you fear any new danger, Senor Castarra?"

"I fear nothing from the single shot we heard, and hope that it may have been fired by my comrade and friend, Pedrillo Mocco. I perceive that the young gentleman yonder is making signals toward the cliff. He appears to have discovered some person."

"I see them!" exclaimed Clara. "There is a man who has let himself down by a rope from behind that huge rock, and another is following him."

"You have good eyes, Miss Clara. Yes, it is my friend! It is Pedrillo!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT SHALL BE DONE?

It was not long before Cortez Castarra had the pleasure of grasping the hand of his friend Pedrillo, and their meeting was such as that of two tried and trusty comrades should be.

Pedrillo bowed low before the ladies, who accompanied him to the wall across the canyon with his chief and Perry Wessel.

Both were cordially welcomed there, and Gid Gray declared that with such an accession to their force they would be able to drive the Apaches out of the canyon.

"Not so, senor," bluntly replied Pedrillo.

"Not so?" demanded the old man. "What do you mean by 'not so'?"

"I mean that what you propose is impossible. The Apaches in front of you are nothing. Those who are coming will quickly drive us all out of the canyon, or to death."

This startling piece of intelligence produced general consternation in the group.

Pedrillo was asked for an explanation, which he gave by relating the adventures of himself and Perry Wessel.

"The Apaches will not attempt to follow us down the cliff," he continued. "I am quite sure of that. But they will find the trail of their friends, and will follow it around to this canyon, and then we must retreat or die fighting."

What was to be done?

That was the question which pressed upon the minds of all, and to which no one appeared to be able to give a satisfactory answer.

Harry Ford moved close to the side of Ida Russell, as if ready to defend her to the last gasp, and Clara Carron was similarly flanked by Frank Ford and Cortez Castarra; but all looked gloomy, as if they foresaw nothing but the worst that might happen.

"How many Indians were there in the gang you met?" inquired the old man.

"At least fifty," answered Pedrillo. "We did not count them carefully; but there could have been no less than that number."

Pedrillo's estimate was confirmed by Perry Wessel, and the question arose, what could so many Apaches be doing in that latitude?

It was much to the north of their usual range, and there must be some special object which had induced them to stray so far in that direction.

"How long before they will get here?" demanded Gid Gray, who had settled in his own mind the purpose of the Apaches in visiting that section of country.

"If Senor Castarra will describe his route to me," replied Pedrillo, "I think I will be able to answer that question."

Cortez Castarra went over the course which he had traveled with Clara and Jotham in escaping from the Apaches, giving the directions and distances as well as he could judge of them.

Pedrillo then gave it as his opinion that the reinforcements to their enemies would probably arrive that night at about midnight.

"There is but one thing for us to do, then," said Gid Gray. "We must retreat."

"But how?" inquired Castarra.

"There is a path by which we can get out of the canyon, and I doubt if the Apaches will be able to find our trail and follow us before morning."

"And then?"

"They may give us a hard race on the level, and it will be a serious journey at best; but it would be sure death to stay here."

It was settled that the retreat should be begun as soon as the movements of the party could be covered by darkness, as it was to be expected that the Apaches would make an attack immediately upon the arrival of their reinforcements.

"It pleases me that we are to wait until night," observed Pedrillo.

"And why so?" inquired Castarra.

"Because my friend and I were obliged to lose our horses when we escaped from the Apaches."

"But does it seem to you that our delay will help you to horses?"

"It will give me time to steal some from the Apaches."

"You would not find that such an easy matter, my friend. It would be necessary to pass their camp in order to reach their horses, and the canyon is so narrow that they block it up completely."

"That makes it difficult, but not impossible," replied Pedrillo.

"I believe that in your opinion nothing is impossible."

"So you have taught me, senor."

"But we cannot afford to lose two such valuable men as you and friend Wessel, and you must avoid risks as much as possible."

"I hope it will not be necessary to run any such risks," observed Gid Gray. "I have two horses. My daughter will ride behind me, and perhaps Clara will allow one of you to accommodate her in the same way. There will then be two horses for these men."

"What will become of your Indian friends?" inquired Frank Ford.

"Zaccarri will stay here, and his wife, Yamalegua, will remain with him. They can easily hide until the Apaches have gone by in pursuit of us, and then they can come out and go where they please. We need have no fear for them, as they will be safe enough."

These points being settled, the party had little to do but to prepare and secure a supply of provisions, with as much water as they could carry, and then wait until night.

A little more they had to do, in the way of watching the enemy and guarding against a possible attack.

This, however, was no arduous duty, as the Apaches contented themselves with a few occasional shots, which were probably intended as a cover for some more important enterprise which was to be carried into effect in the course of the night.

When night came, everything was in readiness for departure, and Gid Gray and his daughter bid the two Navajoes an affectionate farewell.

There was a little friendly strife between Cortez Castarra and Frank Ford, to settle which of them should have the honor of taking Clara Carron *en croupe*.

She disappointed them both by choosing Harry as her cavalier, which caused Ida Russell to slyly shake a little brown fist at her.

The party then set forth, Gid Gray leading the way.

The night was dark, the Apaches were quiet, and everything seemed to favor an orderly and successful retreat.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETREAT.

WHEN the fugitives had passed through the pleasant little valley beyond the stone house, the canyon again became narrow and difficult, the bed being choked up by boulders and heaps of broken rock, through which it was no easy matter for the horses to pick their way in the darkness.

But these difficulties were hardly worth speaking of in comparison with those of the path upon which the leader entered when they had traveled about a mile from the stone wall.

At this point the old man stopped and addressed a few words of caution to his followers before beginning the ascent that was to take them out of the canyon.

The path started in a gorge, but soon became a mere footway along the face of the cliff, winding and zigzagging upward, so narrow in places that it seemed hardly possible for the animals to find foothold, and so steep that they were often in imminent danger of falling backward.

It would have been difficult and dangerous in daylight, and in the darkness its perils were largely increased, though the veil of night shut from the eyes of the fugitives many of the dangers and horrors that might have made their heads giddy or sickened their hearts with fright.

It was not the first time, however, that Gid Gray had traveled that path, and his horse also knew it well.

He led the way, and the others blindly followed, trusting entirely to their horses, though the poor beasts occasionally emitted faint cries and moans, as if they, too, appreciated all the difficulties of that perilous ascent.

Not a word was spoken, except an occasional caution, which was passed in whispers down the line, as if no one dared to speak above his breath.

The slipping of a horse's foot, or the displacement of a stone that went rattling down to the depths below, sent through the entire company the thrill of a fear that something worse than the slip of a foot or the fall of a stone might be noted the next moment.

The path came out upon the plain, as it had left the canyon, through a steep and narrow gorge, where it was barely possible for two horses to walk abreast.

In a little while after they had entered this gorge the whole party rode forth upon the sandy plain, and many long breaths of relief were drawn as they thought of the dangers from which they had emerged, all present and safe.

While they were congratulating themselves upon their escape, the faint sound of the yelling of savages was borne to their ears from below.

Rapidly it drew nearer, until it seemed to come from the bottom of the canyon directly beneath the spot which they had reached.

"Those red people are mad," observed Gid Gray. "I had no idea that they would discover our escape so soon. Is it possible that

the two bands of Apaches have come together already?"

"Hardly possible," answered Castarra. "There would be more yelling if there were two bands of Apaches down there."

"They have got ahead of our calculations, though."

"That is clear enough. They made an attack, I suppose, to which there was no one to reply, and that aroused their suspicions. Then they grew bold enough to advance to the wall, and perceived that we had fled. When their companions join them there will be more excitement than we now hear."

"We had better make a stand right here," suggested Frank Ford. "A few men could hold this pass against an army."

Gid Gray shook his head.

"It wouldn't do," said he. "There is no water or grass. We could not stay here long, and the Indians would send a force around to attack us in the rear."

"It seems to me that we might gain something."

"We are better off as it is, Frank. I don't believe that they will find it possible to follow us before daylight, and then we will have a long start."

After a brief rest the fugitives were ready to follow the directions of Gid Gray and resume their journey.

All but one.

The single exception was Jotham Root, who had dismounted and picketed his mule, showing no disposition to accompany them further.

"What is the matter with you, Jotham?" demanded Clara.

"I'm goin' to stay right here," was his stubborn answer.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mr. Ford gave it to us straight. A few men might stop an army at this place, and I allow that I'm man enough to keep them Injuns back awhile, so's to give you folks a better start."

Tears started in Clara's eyes at this new proof of the devotion of her uncouth but faithful friend.

She called him to her, took his face between her two hands, and pressed a kiss upon his brown forehead.

Frank Ford and Cortez Castarra looked as if they would have been glad to stand in the boy's shoes.

"You are too good and kind," said Clara. "You have done enough for me, Jotham, and I cannot allow you to risk your life any more. You must come with us."

"I'm goin' to stay right here, Miss Clara."

"He is right!" exclaimed Frank Ford as he dismounted.

"He is right, Miss Carron, and I thank him for having taught me my duty. Though one man might not be able to delay the Apaches a long time, two can accomplish something worth while. If he is willing to stay, I will gladly stay with him."

Clara protested again; but her protests were overruled by Gid Gray.

"I think it is a good thing," said the old man. "Two resolute men at this place can hold the Apaches back for hours, and there is not much danger in it; as we will pick out the best horses in the party and leave with them."

Cortez Castarra also proposed to remain; but Frank Ford good-naturedly objected to his offer.

"You have done enough for the present, Senor Castarra," he said. "You have shown your wonderful skill and bravery in rescuing Miss Carron from the Apaches, and now it is my turn to do what I can for her benefit and that of the others. You will not be needed here, and your services will be very valuable on the route."

So it was settled that Frank Ford should remain.

Clara did not favor him as she had favored Jotham; but she rewarded him with a look that might have been worth as much to him as a kiss.

The best two horses in the company were chosen and left with Frank and Jotham, the direction which the party would pursue was described to them, and the others rode away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOLDING THE PASS.

As soon as their friends were out of sight, Frank Ford and Jotham Root set at work to build a barrier of loose stones across the pathway near the head of the gorge.

This work occupied them an hour or more, and Frank, when it was nearly finished, advised his companion to lie down and sleep until his further assistance should be required, as he would need all his energies for the hard ride that was to follow.

Jotham protested that he was not in need of sleep, and continued to work until the little fortification was completed.

As they worked, they could occasionally hear the yells of the Indians below, as they hunted for the trail of the fugitives and gave vent to their feelings of disappointment and rage.

But it was not until the white men were resting from their labor that the sounds increased to such an extent as justified them in the belief that the Apaches had received a large reinforcement.

It was to be expected that the search for the trail would then be prosecuted with renewed vigor; but the two comrades could do nothing but wait and rest.

In the mean time, Frank Ford took a great interest in listening to Jotham's account of Clara Carron's troubles at Salt Lake and her escape from that place.

He did not confide to Jotham his own emotions and aspirations in regard to Clara, as it was plain to be seen that the youth regarded that young lady as scarcely less than an angel, to whom it would be sacrilege for a human being to offer any sentiment but that of adoration.

Time thus passed rapidly, until the light of dawn began to be visible in the eastern sky, when all sounds in the canyon ceased and an intense stillness pervaded the air.

"What does it mean?" demanded Frank, when he had listened anxiously for a while and had heard no sound.

"What do you think it means, Jotham? Have the Indians given up the search and gone back down the canyon?"

"Reckon not," answered the lad. "It ain't thar style to give up so easy as that. More likely they've struck the trail, and are comin' up the path. Jest you listen sharp, mister, and you'll be apt to hear 'em afore long."

Frank did listen with all his ears, and it was not long before he heard the crunching of horses' feet on the rock below, and then the muttering voices of the riders as they toiled up the difficult ascent.

"You were right, Jotham," he said. "They will soon be here, and we must do our best, for Clara's sake."

"You bet!" was the quiet reply, as Jotham examined his rifle and sighted down the pass.

The two white men lay concealed behind the barrier, looking through the crevices of the piled stones, and anxiously awaiting the appearance of their enemies.

They still had a long time to wait; but at length the head of a horse made its appearance where the pathway turned to enter the gorge.

The head was slowly followed by the body of the animal, and then its rider was visible—a half-naked Apache, painted and plumed for the war-path.

As he came in sight of the barrier of stones, the Apache halted and gave utterance to a low exclamation.

The barrier was something unexpected and suspicious, being evidently the work of human hands.

Then he turned, as if to consult those who were following him; but they appeared to urge him on, and he again pressed his horse forward.

"I don't like to shoot that fellow," whispered Frank. "It looks almost like murder."

"Give me the shot, then," requested Jotham. "It don't look a bit like murder to me."

The rifle which Gid Gray had given the lad was a fine one, and he was proud of it and glad of a chance to try it.

He had leveled it between two large stones, and was sighting at the Indian as he spoke, drawing a bead upon a medal that hung against his red skin near the heart.

He pulled the trigger; a spurt of fire flashed out in front of the barrier, and the Apache reeled and fell backward, sliding from his horse upon the rocky pathway, and then dropping down into the depths of the canyon.

The frightened horse, unable to turn, could only plunge forward and make a blind rush at the barrier.

This was a contingency upon which the two white men had not calculated, and it seemed likely to give them some trouble.

But Frank Ford suddenly jumped into view, throwing up his arms with a wild cry, and startled the bewildered animal so that he wheeled and darted back down the pass.

As he went, he rushed against another horse that was about to enter the gorge, knocking him off the pathway with his rider; and following them in their precipitous plunge down the cliff.

"That's purty good so fur," remarked Jotham; "but I ort to ha' fired at the hoss, instid of at the Injun."

By this experience the Apaches had learned a lesson, and thereafter they made their approaches more cautiously.

There could be no doubt that they were boiling over with indignation at the unexpected and very unpleasant check to their progress; but they were obliged to choke down their wrath, as they were unable to vent it on their foes, whose position appeared to be absolutely unassailable.

After an interval of quiet, during which nothing was to be seen and little to be heard of them, a horse came into view from behind the point of rock at which the cliff pathway entered the gorge.

There was no rider on his back; but the white

men were sure, from the style in which the bridle hung about his neck, and from his manner of sidling up the narrow way, that a man was clinging to him somewhere.

In this surmise they were speedily confirmed by the sight of a foot, fastened in the girth where it passed over the pad that answered for a saddle.

They then knew that the rider was on the off side of the animal, directing his movements, and striving to keep his own person sheltered from hostile bullets.

"I shall shoot that horse," said Frank.

Hardly had he spoken when his rifle cracked, and the well-aimed bullet struck the horse in the breast near the left shoulder.

The stricken beast reared and fell, and rolled over the edge of the path into the valley.

But the rider had extricated himself from his perilous position with wonderful agility, and he at once ran up the gorge with his rifle in his hand.

Then Jotham Root's rifle spoke, and the Apache fell dead in his tracks.

Another had followed him on foot, and the Indians in the rear set up a yell, supposing that they had drawn the fire of their foes.

But Frank Ford had hastened to reload, and his speedy bullet stopped the career of the daring Apache, who was badly wounded and glad to get back to cover.

"That was tarnation close," observed Jotham as he rammed down a bullet. "If they had made a rush at us then, mister, we would ha' had to git out o' this."

"You are right," answered Frank, "and I begin to believe that we will not be able to keep them back as long as we had expected to. But we must do our best, Jotham. Every minute is so much gained for our friends who have gone before."

Another interval of quiet followed—a long and tedious interval—during which the white men could only wonder what had become of their enemies, and conjecture what scheme they would next try for the reduction of the little fortress.

It was hardly to be supposed that they would go away, as it was not in accordance with their nature to abandon a project on which their minds were evidently so strongly set, and in which they had sustained such severe losses.

On the contrary, it was pretty certain that they would attempt to force a passage at all hazards.

"Reckon they've sent a party around," observed Jotham, when the interval of quiet had lasted nearly an hour.

"I suppose they have," replied Frank; "but we need have no fear of them, as it will be a long time before they can reach us. We must look out now, my boy; for I hear something moving, and we may expect a grand rush."

Then came a wild and almost human cry, as of an animal in mortal agony, and a horse darted out from behind the point of rock where the Apaches were concealed, and rushed frantically up the gorge, as if maddened by fear or pain.

It was useless to try to frighten back the already terrified creature, and it was clear that he would leap over the light barrier unless his career could be stopped.

A bullet from Jotham Root's rifle brought the horse to its knees; but another had been started in the same manner, and it was necessary for Frank Ford to shoot the second animal.

Instantly the Apaches darted out into the gorge, one after another, and ran toward the barrier, uttering yells of triumph and vengeance.

They had drawn the fire of the white men by sacrificing two horses, and had the game in their own hands.

"We must run for it!" cried Frank, and the two white men darted out upon the plain and ran for their horses.

Hastily pulling up the picket-pins, they mounted and dashed away, in spite of a few hastily-aimed shots that were sent after them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NEWS IN MORMONDOM.

THERE was great excitement in a certain circle at Salt Lake, concerning a piece of news that had come from California.

In that circle the history of Clara Carron—at least during her residence in Salt Lake—and of her flight and its cause was well known, and the persons who composed it were deeply interested in her.

Their interest was largely increased by the receipt of the bit of news that has been mentioned.

The news was to the effect that an aunt of Clara Carron's, the widow of a wealthy Californian, had lately died, leaving Clara the heiress to a very valuable property.

It was brought to Salt Lake by a Mormon who had heard it in San Francisco, who had been struck by the name, and had made inquiries which had satisfied him that the young lady in question was the daughter of Mat Carron, the well-known Danite leader.

When this news reached the circle which has

been alluded to, it produced a powerful impression upon two of them.

One of the two, it may reasonably be supposed, was Mat Carron himself, the father of the reputed heiress.

Mat Carron was a tall and powerful man, with iron-gray hair and commanding presence, whose appearance was suggestive of an elder or a titling man, if of no higher church official.

His actual position was that of a subordinate leader in the "Danite Band"—the Janizaries who were employed by the Mormon authorities to enforce their often illegal decrees, and to punish recusants, malcontents and others who were hostile to "the Church," or had fallen under its displeasure.

Mat Carron had joined the Mormons from motives of personal advancement.

He had sought and obtained this position because of its lucrative nature, and to demonstrate his "zeal."

His agreement with Elder Hynes, by which Clara was to be "sealed" to that dignitary, had been entered into for the purpose of securing his elevation among the Mormons.

He had repented of it to a certain extent, as was evidenced by the fact that he had not entered as heartily as he might have done into the arrangements for pursuing and recapturing his daughter.

Mat Carron had not originally been a bad man at heart; but unrestrained passions had led him on until he frequently lost sight of the better feelings of his nature, and forgot even the instincts of love and protection toward those of his own blood and kindred.

His wife had feared him while she loved him, and it was the anguish caused by his excesses, as well as the hardships of her last journey, that had brought her to her grave.

Clara had pitied him while she blamed him, and had not separated herself from him until fears for her future had absolutely compelled her to take that step.

He often drank to excess, and from this fault had sprung all his other failings.

During his drinking bouts he was wild, reckless and utterly unmanageable, and his appearance on the street sometimes caused great consternation, even in Salt Lake.

This fault, however, was easily overlooked by his employers, as he was a useful man, blindly obedient to their behests, and could always be relied on to carry out any plan of action that was laid down for him.

When he received the news of Clara's heirship, he had just returned from an expedition, concerning which it is only necessary to say that the execution of his orders had been decidedly unpleasant, even for him, and he had sought to blunt the points of certain inward stings by a free indulgence in liquor.

He opened his eyes wide at the news, but said little, merely remarking that he did not believe there was much in it, and doubted whether it could refer to his girl.

The Mormon who had brought him the information carried away the impression that the news had hardly been worth telling after all; but he would have changed his opinion if he could have seen Mat Carron's performance when he was alone.

He poured out a great glass of whisky, which he took down at a gulp, and then paced the floor of his room restlessly, stopping every now and then to feed with liquor the excitement that was blazing within him.

It was plain to him just then that he had treated Clara very badly, and he wished that he had known of this windfall sooner.

There could be no doubt that his daughter was the heiress, as it was her aunt Hannah who had married the wealthy Californian.

If his conduct had not driven her from him, she might enjoy her prosperity, and he might share it with her.

As it was, his treatment of her appeared to have cut off his chances in that respect, if it had not cut Clara off from the favors of fortune and from the world.

"I will go and seek her," was the conclusion at which he arrived.

"I can persuade her to be friendly with me again, and she will not throw me off in my old age."

"I will promise to reform, and will keep the promise."

"I will cut loose from these Mormons, and will go to California, and we will live happily there."

"There is not enough money in the Mormon business, anyhow, and I wish I had never had anything to do with that greasy old reprobate, Abner Hynes."

"Yes, I can settle everything to my satisfaction if I can find her, and I must find her."

Captain Carron was in this frame of mind, and had just strengthened his resolution by pouring down another glass of whisky, when he was honored by a call from Elder Hynes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ELDER HYNES CHIPS IN.

ABNER HYNES had the appearance of being what Mat Carron called him, a greasy old reprobate.

He was a man past middle age, fat, oily and demure, with bushy hair, small eyes, puffy cheeks, and thick, sensuous lips.

He was highly respectable in his dress and demeanor; but there was a lurking, cat-like cruelty in the expression of his features, which was seldom entirely concealed by his assumption of sanctity.

Such a man, altogether, as a child or a pure woman would naturally dread, but who might easily be chosen as one of the chief agents in constructing a new thearchy.

He came in rubbing his hands and smiling, and addressed to Captain Carron a few complimentary remarks upon the success of his late expedition, which that person received moodily, and to which he made scanty replies.

Then the elder opened the real object of his visit.

"I have heard some good news concerning your daughter, Captain Carron," he said, "and have come to tell it to you, supposing that you have not already received it."

"Has she been found?" eagerly inquired Carron.

"Not that I am aware of. I have not heard from her, but have heard an important fact that relates to her. It seems that Providence, in its infinite mercy, has seen fit to bless her with the heirship to a fortune."

"Oh, yes," carelessly replied Carron. "I have heard that story."

The elder's face fell.

He doubtless began to believe that the news upon which he had been felicitating himself was not very important after all, as one of the principal parties in interest received it so coolly.

"Don't you believe it to be true?" he demanded, unable to conceal his surprise.

"I wish I could believe it; but it is quite incredible."

"Is that really your opinion, Captain Carron?"

"If my daughter has an aunt in California, I never knew it. These stories about unknown relatives turning up and leaving large amounts of property to heirs who had never heard of them, are very interesting; but the trouble with them is that they are seldom true."

"I was hoping that this might prove to be one of the true stories. Not that I would make any difference with me. By no means. It was for the young lady's sake, for the salvation of her precious soul, that I wished her to be sealed to me, and not from any selfish motive. For her sake, and incidentally for yours, I hoped that the story might prove true."

"I wish it might, myself; but I don't think, elder, that we need give ourselves any trouble about it. Won't you have some whisky?"

"No, I thank you. I never drink, captain, and am sorry that you do. It is the only thing that tends to mar your usefulness in this field."

"It is my opinion that whisky is a help to my peculiar kind of usefulness," muttered Mat Carron, as he filled his glass.

"By the way," resumed the elder, "as we are speaking about the young lady, I am minded to say to you that I have certain fears and anxieties concerning her. Do you think that the young man who was sent after her is to be trusted entirely?"

"I am glad that you have spoken about that, elder, as I have also felt some anxiety about her. As for that young man, I must admit that I know very little about him."

"Do you suppose, captain, that the California story could have come to his knowledge?"

"That is quite improbable; but in any event, it is doubtful whether he could be fully trusted. We sent him, you know, because we supposed that his kinship might induce her to confide herself to his care, and not because we believed him to be a first-class man. He is of my own name and blood; but I would really be afraid to trust him with anything valuable."

If Mat Carron had not previously regarded his daughter as something valuable, he had lately gained a realizing sense of her value.

"Something of the kind had occurred to me, brother Carron," observed the elder. "Suppose he should take it into his head to play us false and secure Clara for himself?"

"The very thing that I have been afraid of. He is young and ardent and ambitious."

"And the maiden is fair to look upon. There is danger that he may be tempted."

"There is also danger that she may yield to his persuasion. Finding herself alone and helpless, she would naturally be grateful to him if he should show her a way out of her difficulties. He has a smooth tongue, and may be able to turn her gratitude to love. I wish I had gone in his place."

"Would it not be well for you to go now and look after him?" suggested the elder.

"That is just what I have been thinking about, and I will gladly go, if I can get released from my duties here."

"There will be no trouble about that. I can easily arrange it for you."

"I can't go alone, elder. I ought to have an escort—half a dozen or so of my men."

"I will arrange that for you, too."

"You had better attend to it as soon as possible."

"It shall be attended to right away. And so you think that there is no truth in that story?"

"Just as I told you, elder. It is possible that it may be true; but the chance is so slim that I don't think it worth talking about."

Elder Hynes considered it worth thinking about, if not worth talking about, and he did think about it.

He had observed Mat Carron's eagerness to go in search of his daughter, and had not been slow to attribute it to its true cause, a belief in the story that Clara had become an heiress, and a desire to get control of her and share her good fortune.

The elder felt that it would need something more than Mat Carron's careless denial to discredit the story, and was more eager than ever to add Clara to the number of his wives.

He astonished Carron, therefore, when he came to inform him that he had secured permission for him to undertake the expedition with an escort, by also informing him that he would be favored with the company of himself, Elder Hynes.

Captain Carron, who could not conceal his surprise at this change of the plan, asked him what object he had in setting out on such a journey.

"We may be obliged to go down into the Indian country," answered the elder, "and I have no doubt that we will be. In that case you might get into trouble without me. We have peculiar relations with some of the Indians, and my position gives me a great influence among them, which can be made very useful in case of necessity. I am naturally very anxious about the safety of the lady who is to become my wife."

Mat Carron tried to dissuade him from the journey by speaking of its perils and hardships; but this only confirmed the elder in his belief that Clara's father meant to play false with him and the Mormons, and he obstinately stuck to his purpose of accompanying the expedition.

The Danite leader could not help perceiving that his superior in the church was suspicious of him.

For his part he was resolved that the elder should have cause for his suspicions.

As Hynes was to accompany him for the purpose of thwarting his treasonable intentions, he determined to select as his escort only such men as were devoted to him personally, instead of the Mormon church, and so to attach them to him by promises of reward that he might set the elder at defiance whenever it should be to his interest to do so.

Thus it happened that he shortly rode out of Salt Lake City toward the south, followed by six rough but reliable men, and accompanied by Elder Abner Hynes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CASTARRA FREES HIS MIND.

By daylight Gid Gray and his party were far from the canyon from which they had fled, having crossed plains, climbed cliffs, and traversed frightful ravines.

They had not moved rapidly, as the cliffs and canyons had been formidable obstacles to their progress in the darkness.

At times they would have been obliged to come to a full stop, had it not been for the skillful pilotage of the old man, who was so well acquainted with the country that he could follow the right track as unerringly as an Indian or a bird.

With his eyes fixed on a star in the east he had undeviatingly pursued the course which he had pointed out to Frank Ford and Jonathan Root, as it would be necessary for them in their hasty retreat before the Apaches to follow a certain direction without being compelled to look for a trail as they rode.

It was believed that Frank's habits and instincts as an engineer would enable him to take and keep the course.

So they rode on, and the sun sailed up into the sky, and the dreary wilderness stretched out before them unendingly.

Clara Carron was silent and sad.

She took no part in the general congratulations of the party upon their escape, and frequently looked back over the trail they had traveled, as if hoping to catch sight of those who had been left behind.

"It is not worth while to look for those fellows, Clara," said Gid Gray, who had noticed her backward glances.

"I can't help looking for them," she pleaded.

"But I hope it will be a long time before we see them, as the Apaches are likely to be close behind them when they do come."

"That is what I am afraid of. Our friends may be killed or captured by the Indians."

"Not much danger of that, my child. We left them the fastest horses in the party, and they can easily get away in time and have a good start."

Clara was silent and sad, in spite of these encouraging words.

She could not rid herself of the fear that Frank and Jotham might be sacrificed for her safety.

Cortez Castarra perceived that she was troubled, and took occasion to speak to her at the

first camping-place, hoping that he might console and cheer her.

"It grieves me to see you distressed, senorita," said he. "I wish I had stayed behind with those two."

"Why so, Senor Castarra?"

"Because you seem to fear that they are in danger, and I would have been able to help them."

"You have done enough already, my kind friend, and I owe my life to your skill and courage. Besides, my uncle said that two would be sufficient and a third man might be more hindrance than help."

"I wish, then, that I had remained there in the place of my friend, Ford."

"Why in his place?" she demanded. "Why not in the place of the other?"

"Because I believe that he loves you, and that you tremble on his account."

"I tremble for both of them."

"You feel very kindly toward the other, no doubt, as you well may; but his loss would hardly affect you so deeply as the loss of Ford might."

"How do you know that Mr. Ford loves me?" timidly asked Clara.

"Ah, senorita, they who love know the signs of love. It is because I love you so entirely, myself, that I can see so plainly."

Clara's eyes drooped.

She had already read in Castarra's face the declaration that came to his lips.

"I do love you," continued the Mexican, "with all my heart and mind and strength, and you know it well. I have come from El Paso with no other purpose but to seek you."

"You have already told me that."

"After I met you at Santa Fe there was no rest for me until I could see you again. I do not ask your love, and had not meant to speak of mine until you should be clear of all perils."

"We are not clear of them yet," she ventured to suggest.

"This confession slipped out in answer to your question. I pray you to forget it for the present, and let us go on together as if it had not been made."

"Why is it," inquired Clara, "when you believe that Mr. Ford loves me, that you were willing to stay behind and leave him with the party?"

"It is because I love you. Because my love is so strong and true that it is entirely unselfish. Because I wish to do everything that may please you and make you happy."

"You are very good."

"Our friend Ford is a gentleman, and I desire to act toward him as I believe he would act toward me. It is for this reason that I did not mean to speak to you as I have spoken, but to wait until you could be placed in a position of safety, when you would be free to decide between us."

"You are a noble man, Senor Castarra. I honor you and respect your motives."

"Let us say no more about it, Miss Clara. I am of the same opinion with your uncle, that our gallant rear guard is not in much danger."

"I hope and pray that your opinion may be justified by the result."

"They will only hold the Apaches back while it is safe to do so, and will then hasten to overtake us. There may be accidents, it is true; but we have no special cause for alarm."

"But they may lose their way," suggested Clara, "and may not be able to find us."

"That is possible; but our trail is plain, and there is no fear that a rain will come and wash it out. Our friends are about to move on, Miss Clara, and your escort is waiting for you to mount."

Occasional stoppages were necessary, but were as infrequent and as brief as it was possible to make them.

The horses required rest, and their riders could not do without it.

The halts were made wherever grass and water could be found, as it was all-important that the horses should be kept in a condition to travel.

Gid Gray, who continued to act as guide, hoped that they would hold out until Fort Defiance could be sighted, or at least until he could reach a point at which he was aiming, where they might make a stand if the Apaches should press them too hard.

The start which they had gained seemed to justify him in this expectation; but it was also necessary to push forward as rapidly as possible, as there could be no doubt that their enemies would out-travel them, the Apache horses being harder than theirs and better able to endure the lack of food and drink.

Their riders, also, were more accustomed to the hardships of such journeys than the white people were, and had no women to incumber them or cause delay.

It was necessary, therefore, to press on with all possible speed, though the fatigues of travel were telling upon all concerned.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CASA GRANDE.

AFTER the second day's journey it was considered proper at every halt to leave a man in the rear as far as he could be seen, who was to

watch for Jotham Root and Frank Ford, as well as for the Apaches, and to give the alarm if they should come in sight.

When the route was resumed, he would come forward and overtake the party.

At noon of the third day they made a halt for rest and refreshment.

They had just crossed a broad desert of sand, and before them lay a rough and broken country, full of chasms, cliffs and immense canyons.

Behind them, at such a distance that the figures of himself and his horse were just discernible against the horizon, was Perry Wessel, who had been detailed as the rearward scout for that occasion.

A close watch was kept upon him, as Gid Gray had declared that their friends and the Apaches might be expected to come in sight at any moment, and it was of the highest importance that their approach should be signaled.

Suddenly the dim figure there at the westward gave signs of motion.

Above it was something like a tufted stick, which was slowly moved to and fro.

It was the scout's rifle, with his cap on the end of it, and this was the signal which had been agreed on.

"He has sighted our friends or our enemies," said Old Gid. "If they are friends, as I hope they are, the enemies are not likely to be far behind, and we must push forward as fast as we can."

Excitement at once spread through the party, mingled with no little uneasiness and apprehension.

All mounted their horses and pressed on, after a backward glance at the scout, who remained motionless, as he had been before he made the signal.

"I wish," said Clara, "that we might have stopped there until we could learn whether those are our friends. I am very fearful about them."

"That is the reason why Wessel has not come on to join us," replied the old man. "He is waiting to find out who it is that he has sighted, and we will know more about it when he overtakes us."

So the party toiled on, among rocks and through ravines, until, as they rose the crest of a ridge, they caught sight of Perry Wessel in the rear, coming toward them at full speed.

Still they pressed on, and in a little while he overtook them.

"They are two white men," he said, in answer to the questions that were showered upon him. "They are our friends, of course, and the 'Paches ain't far behind 'em. I've come to git the course, and am goin' back to lead 'em on, 'cause 'twill be slow work follerin' a trail in this sort of a kentry."

"A mile or so ahead of us," answered Gid Gray, "is the beginning of a long and deep canyon. A little way up the canyon, at the left side as you go in, is a ruined stone house, one of the *casas grandes* of old times. You will find us there. Hurry back and bring the men."

Perry Wessel put spurs to his horse, and dashed back along the trail.

"Are you going to make a stop, uncle, at the ruin you spoke of?" asked Clara.

"Yes. That is the point I have been aiming for. I did not suppose that we could reach Defiance before the Apaches should overtake us, as we and our stock must have more rest than our pursuers need. For that reason I have headed toward the ruin, though we have come somewhat out of our course to strike it."

"Will we be safe there?"

"I feel sure that we can keep off the Apaches behind those walls, and there is an old well in the ruin which will supply us with water in plenty."

"What will be done with the horses?" inquired Harry Ford.

"There is room for them in the ruin, and enough for them to live on, unless I am mistaken. If we get short of food, I can assure you that horse meat is not bad in a pinch. I hope that we will be able to hold out there until we can get aid from Defiance."

The canyon was soon reached and entered and the fugitives rode up its bed at good speed until they reached the ruin of which Gid Gray had spoken.

It was a square building—or what had once been a square building—perched upon a flat rock, some fifty feet above the bed of the canyon.

The western and southern ends were partly in ruins; but the walls on the northern and eastern sides were intact or nearly so, showing the excellent workmanship that had caused them to endure so long.

The only approach for horses was on the western side, by a steep and narrow pathway, which seemed to have been cut out of the cliff.

Up the narrow way the party rode, until they reached a small opening in the broken wall, which was so choked up by fallen stone that they were obliged to dismount and lead their horses.

Within the inclosure all were surprised—with the exception of Gid Gray, who had evidently been there before—at the massiveness and solidity of the remaining walls, which must

have resisted the action of time and the elements during an indefinite series of years.

The building had been divided into four apartments by heavy stone partitions, and across them had been laid enormous beams, some of which were as sound as when the tools of the workmen fashioned them.

They had need to be heavy and sound, as upon those beams, instead of upon the lower walls, a smaller and lighter upper story had formerly stood, after the fashion of the houses of the Pueblos.

The greater part of this story had fallen down, and a portion had fallen in, while the remainder lay in ruins, still supported by the stout beams.

The interior of the *casa grande* presented a dilapidated appearance, being choked up by fallen stone and rubbish, with the exception of the two apartments on the north side, one of which was comparatively free from obstructions, and the other entirely so.

It must not be supposed that the fugitives wasted any time in examining the structure, or in giving utterance to their emotions of surprise and joy.

There was work to be done, and they hastened to give it their attention.

Under the direction of Sol Scott they stabled the horses in one of the apartments, and set at work to clear away the stones at the entrance, so arranging them that they could easily be thrown back and formed into a barrier after the arrival of their comrades.

When they had finished this task they prepared platforms to fire from, at the broken wall and at those parts of the fortress where openings had been left in the masonry, and examined their weapons, so as to be ready for the expected struggle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ATTACK AND DEFENSE.

It was nearly dusk down there in the valley, though the last rays of the sun were still lingering on the level above, when the men in the *casa grande* had finished their most pressing work.

But there was no rest for them, as Harry Ford, who had been stationed on the roof as a lookout, proclaimed the stirring fact that there were three horsemen in sight.

All rushed to the points from which the best view was to be had, to verify this intelligence.

They were then gladdened by the sight of three horsemen, one of whom was undoubtedly Perry Wessel, and the others were their long expected rear guard.

Wessel was holding in his horse, as if to accommodate himself to the gait of the others, who were urging their broken-down animals to the greatest speed of which they were capable.

At the same time he was looking back now and then.

The reason of his backward glances was soon apparent, as a dark cloud of horsemen came into view, sweeping through the canyon after the three white men.

It did not need a second look to satisfy the beholders that they were the pursuing Apaches, and their formidable numbers and array caused a few exclamations and muttered remarks.

"There are a great many of them," observed Cortez Castarra.

"Very true," answered the old man; "but we have these stone walls to fight for us."

"Let us be thankful for that."

As the white riders drew nearer, their friends showed themselves wherever they could, and waved their hats and shouted to encourage them.

Perry Wessel also appeared to be urging on his comrades, whose horses staggered as if hardly able to carry them.

These demonstrations were seen by the Apaches, whose yells could easily be heard at the stone house, as they fiercely pressed the pursuit which was so nearly successful.

Almost within rifle-shot of their friends Jotham Root's horse faltered and fell; but the lad was up in an instant, with his rifle in his hand, pushing forward as rapidly as his mounted companions.

In the long race the slowest horses of the pursuers had fallen behind, while the best had not only kept in the advance, but had gained on the white men.

Thus the Apaches presented the appearance of a long and straggling train, with a few of the best mounted men in the lead.

Those few were emphatically close to the men they were pursuing when the latter reached the steep path that led up to the stone house.

The foremost had raised his gun, and was about to fire upon his retreating foes, when his purpose was anticipated by Jotham Root, who had halted and turned in his tracks.

A bullet from the lad's rifle struck the Apache fairly in the breast, and he tumbled to the ground, cured forever of the habit of chasing white men.

This served as a temporary check to his comrades who were nearest to him, and Jotham took advantage of the opportunity to seize and

mount the flying horse, on which he rode up the ascent after his friends.

At this the Apaches became furious, and those who were in the advance charged up the steep path just as Frank Ford and his companions rode into the stone house.

This was what Gideon Gray's party had been anxiously waiting for, and a volley from the broken wall taught the rash pursuers a lesson in prudence, by which two of them would not be able to profit in this world.

Those who could retreat made haste to get out of range and waited for their comrades, who were coming on as rapidly as their jaded horses would bring them.

The white men reloaded their weapons as soon as they had fired, and then set at work with a will to block up the entrance with the loose stones that were lying about.

Frank Ford and Jotham Root, in the mean time, were receiving the congratulations of their friends, who pressed them for an account of their long race.

"We had nearly an hour's start," said Frank, "and we made the best use of our time."

"Our horses were very good; but the Apaches had some good horses, too."

"The great difficulty was to keep the route without stopping to hunt the trail, though I have had considerable experience in that line."

"We would have gone far astray in the night and would surely have been captured if it had not been for Jotham, who seemed to follow the trail by instinct, and always took us back to it when we had missed it."

"There was very little rest, you may be sure, for ourselves or our horses, as the Apaches kept us up to our work until we were often ready to drop."

"Sometimes they pressed us too close; but we picked off a few of the foremost, and taught them to be more cautious, as we had no idea of being taken by two or three men in the advance."

"It is a good thing for us that you stopped at this place, as we could not have gone any further."

"As it is, we are nearly used up, but have escaped without any hurt, except a slight scratch on my left shoulder."

Clara was at once interested in that "slight scratch," and she compelled Frank to submit his arm to her examination.

She found a flesh wound, which she bound up as well as she could.

Before she had finished the operation Frank was fast asleep, seated against the stone wall.

He did not sleep long, as yells and shouts and rifle-shots awoke him and called him to action.

The straggling Apaches had come up until all were massed in the canyon, just out of range of the *casa grande*.

That fortification appeared to puzzle them, and they were in no hurry to attack it, as they had already had considerable experience of the quality of the men who were supposed to be within it.

There was a great deal of riding about, with several reconnaissances on foot, all serving to develop the fact that the structure was entirely unassailable on the northern and eastern sides, the broken walls on the south and west presenting the only points where an attack could have any chance of success.

It was quite late when they determined on an assault, and their preparations were made under cover of the darkness, though the white men had no difficulty in guessing pretty correctly at what was going on.

Part of them crawled up, concealed by the scattered rocks and in the shadows of the building and the bluff, until they were within easy rifle-shot of the walls.

The others massed themselves at the narrow pathway, hoping to make a rush and gain the entrance under cover of the fire of their outlying comrades.

The white men had rightly conjectured their plan of operations, and were prepared to meet it.

"There are eight of us now," observed Gid Gray—"counting in my girl if it comes to a pinch—and I think we are enough for them, behind these stone walls."

"We kin worry 'em some," remarked Jotham.

"But we must place ourselves carefully, so as to make our work tell, and we mustn't throw away a shot. Mind what you are doing, boys, and don't pay any attention to those red-skins down in the canyon. They won't be likely to hurt us unless we show ourselves too plainly. Those who mean to rush upon us here are the fellows we need to watch, and they must get the full benefit of our fire."

Some of those to whom the old man was talking understood Indian warfare and Apache tactics quite as well as he did, if not better; but they doubtless recognized the fact that he was talking sense.

All implicitly obeyed his directions, and took the places he assigned them, most of the men being concealed behind a pile of stones at the entrance, and the others so located that their rifles bore upon the only approach to the fortress.

"Now let them come!" cried Gid Gray. "Don't fire until I give the word, and then only the first squad. Where is Frank?"

A horrible series of yells broke in before this question could be answered, followed by the rattling reports of firearms on both the exposed sides of the ruin.

As the bullets pattered against the stones, and the shots became more frequent and the yells more deafening, the scene was like a pandemonium, and might well cause the stoutest nerves to quiver.

But the white men were firm and silent, making no reply to the noisy attack, though they ached to shoot down a few of the daring warriors who were dancing and yelling in plain sight and easy range, as if to invite their fire.

As Frank Ford came running out from the interior apartment, and took the position that was allotted to him, the real attack began.

About twenty picked warriors, afoot and nearly naked, suddenly started up the sloping way, and rushed toward the entrance to the ruin.

Not a sound issued from their lips; but they pressed on silently and swiftly, as if they understood the perilous nature of their enterprise, and knew that some of them, at least, were going to certain death.

Those in the rear, however, redoubled their noise and their firing, and rushed toward the ruin, as if a simultaneous attack was to be made upon all the exposed portions.

By none of these maneuvers did they succeed in diverting the attention or changing the purpose of their white adversaries, who were held by their leader firmly to the plan that had been marked out.

They waited behind their cover, with leveled rifles and tense nerves, for the onslaught which they must meet successfully or perish.

With clinched teeth and knitted brows the Apaches pressed up the slope, showing an admirable bravery, in view of the fact that a storm of fire might burst forth at any moment and sweep them from the path.

The storm did not come.

For a second or so the daring assailants halted in surprise, and then they dashed forward again.

"Now is your time, boys," muttered Old Gideon. "Aim close. First squad, fire!"

Three spurts of fire flashed out from the ruin, and the foremost warriors fell; but the others pressed on over their dead bodies.

"Second squad, fire!"

Four more rifles cracked, and the bullets, at such close range, passed through the bodies of the warriors at whom they were aimed, and wounded the men in their rear.

This threw the attacking party into disorder, temporarily checking their charge, and the first squad in the ruin took advantage of those few seconds of delay to reload their rifles.

As the Apaches again pressed on, firing and yelling as they came, more spurts of fire shot out from the ruin with deadly effect.

Then the white men drew their revolvers, which they handled rapidly and with precision.

This reception was sickening to the Apaches.

Reinforcements had already started up the slope; but they were met and turned back by the survivors of the attacking band, who had fled in dismay from that fatal opening in the wall of rock.

Under the instructions of their leader, to "load and fire at will," the white men sought other positions, and occupied themselves in scattering the outlying Indians, whose fire they had not hitherto deigned to notice.

"I will guarantee that those red-skins won't bother us again to-night," remarked the old man. "Frank Ford, you and Jotham had better go and get some rest. Put away your rifle, Ida. You have proved yourself as good a soldier as any of us."

Harry Ford evidently thought that she had; for he gazed at her admiringly as he escorted her into the inner apartment.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CARRON'S SEARCH.

THE reception of Andrew Carron and Francisco de Lerdo by the Apaches was not at first altogether such as those young men might have wished it to be.

It was quite repugnant to their feelings to be bound and carried in the rear of the pursuing party as prisoners, and this proceeding caused them to entertain a serious doubt of the success of their negotiations.

When they had reached Old Gid's canyon, however, and it had been discovered that the outlawed man was there, accompanied by the captives who had been rescued from the Apaches, and by some other white people, Red Sleeve and his band began to treat their three prisoners with more consideration.

A council of the warriors was held, to which the white men were invited, and a treaty was made between Andrew Carron, as agent for the "Mormoney father," and Red Sleeve acting for the Apaches.

The treaty was to the effect, firstly, that Andrew Carron should procure the payment to

the Apaches of the reward that had been offered for the death or capture of Gid Gray.

Secondly, he was to furnish to them a specified quantity of weapons, blankets, cloths and other articles, in consideration of the capture and delivery to him of Clara Carron.

Nothing was said concerning the other white people, and their fate was left entirely to the discretion of the Apaches.

When this arrangement was completed, the three men were set at liberty, and were allowed to do as they pleased, though it was understood that they were not to wander away from the camp.

They were too well pleased with affairs as they stood to wish to leave their allies, to whom they did not hesitate to render all the assistance in their power.

The Apaches, on their part, pushed their operations vigorously, stimulated by the promise of large rewards, as well as by the prospect of procuring the scalps and plunder of the hated white people.

But Red Sleeve and his band soon discovered, greatly to their disappointment, that the wall behind which their foes were concealed was a more formidable barrier than they had expected to find it.

It also became evident to them that there were more fighting men behind the barrier than they had calculated upon finding there.

In fact, after the failure of his attempts to carry the fortification, the chief was forced to the conclusion that the wall and the men who guarded it were able to hold out against him and his band for an indefinite period of time.

Their surprise was great, therefore, when they finally discovered that the white people had evacuated their position, and had retreated quietly, under cover of the night, when there was no visible cause for such a movement.

Instant pursuit was of course the next thing in order.

The Apaches, after ransacking the little stone house, hastened up the canyon on the trail of the fugitives.

Their delays and difficulties as they made their way out of the canyon increased the discouragement and irritation of the chief and his warriors, and those feelings were not allayed by the arrival of the large body of reinforcements, who might be expected to share in the gains of the enterprise, as well as to insure its success.

When the barrier at the head of the pass had been broken, Red Sleeve and the warriors who were with him set off at once, without waiting for the party that had been sent around, and pushed forward in pursuit of the fugitives.

They kept up the chase until the horses and their riders were nearly ready to drop, and until their career was finally brought to a pause by a more formidable obstacle than they had yet encountered.

It seemed reasonable, not only to the Apaches, but to their white allies, that numbers must prevail against skill and pluck and position.

But the bloody repulse of their first attempt disheartened the Indians, and made them doubt whether their final gains would be worth the price they were paying for them.

They began to cast dark looks upon Andrew Carron and his comrades, as if the three white men were the cause of their calamities.

The leading warriors held consultations, on the night of the defeat and during the next morning, to which the white men were not admitted, nor were they informed of the result of the deliberations.

They gleaned enough, however, from the actions of the Apaches, and from occasional words that were dropped, to justify them in coming to the conclusion that the chiefs were seriously thinking of abandoning the enterprise and returning to their own country.

In such an event, the white men might well wonder, what would be their fate.

Would they be turned loose, and left to find their way back to civilization as best they might, with the chance of falling victims to the vengeance of those whom they had been pursuing?

Or would the Apaches, indignant at the failure of an enterprise in which their losses had been so great, turn upon those who had led them into it, and wreak a bloody vengeance upon their helpless heads?

It was impossible for the white men to answer those questions; but every hour strengthened them in the belief that the Apaches intended to raise the siege and go home.

This would probably have been the end of the enterprise, if a new arrival had not unexpectedly changed the face of affairs.

The arrival was the party of Captain Mat Carron, consisting of himself, his six Danites, and Elder Hynes.

Captain Carron had followed down the Green river valley, in order to intercept his nephew, who, it was supposed, would take that route on his return to Salt Lake.

He saw nothing of Andrew, and was gradually forced to the conclusion that the young man had been unsuccessful in his search, or had betrayed his trust, or had got into some difficulty from which he was unable to extricate himself.

This state of affairs was anything but agreeable to him, and kept his temper on edge all the while.

It also tended to make Elder Hynes a very unpleasant companion, especially as the elder's milk of human kindness had been badly soured by the fatigues and discomforts of the journey.

The churchman grumbled, and hinted at treachery and double-dealing; while the man of war pursued his way impatiently, determined that he would not abandon the undertaking until he should ascertain all the facts in the case.

South of the San Juan they came upon a broad trail, leading toward the east.

Captain Carron and his men examined this trail, and were unanimously of the opinion that it had been made by a large party of Indians.

But, *what* Indians were they?

Where had they come from, and whither were they going?

Further examination developed the fact that there were tracks of shod horses in the trail, and the conclusion from these indications was that there were white men in the party.

This discovery induced Captain Carron to follow the trail to a halting-place, and there he found, greatly to his gratification, a torn envelope addressed to Andrew Carron.

All were elated by the belief that they had hit the right trail at last, though it seemed probable that Andrew Carron was in the power of the Indians.

As for Elder Hynes, he rubbed his hands gleefully, and chuckled in his self-satisfaction.

"It is a good thing that I came with you, Captain Carron," said the elder. "You will now see what influence I have over those Indians. If they have captured your nephew and your daughter, you shall see how soon I will get the captives out of their hands. Surely all things work together for the good of the Saints."

Captain Carron paid no attention to this "tail talk," but pushed forward as rapidly as possible, following the plain trail until it terminated in the canyon where the Indians had halted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

COMPLICATIONS.

THE appearance of Captain Carron's party caused no little commotion among the Apaches, who were at first inclined to believe that they had come to the assistance of the white people in the *casa grande*, and made preparations to receive them accordingly.

But the new-comers halted within sight of the camp, and made signals of friendship, and then Andrew Carron recognized his uncle and Elder Hynes.

Though the arrival of those dignitaries threatened to interfere seriously with the bargain he had made with Francisco de Lerdo, Andrew was right glad to see them.

The position of himself and his companions, in view of the expected action of the Apaches, was at least precarious, and it was to be hoped that his friends might help them out of the scrape.

The certainty of life is surely better than the promise of money.

He hastened with De Lerdo to Red Sleeve, and told him that the white men in sight were their "Mormoney friends," who had doubtless come to assist them in the enterprise in which they were engaged.

The chief then invited the party to approach, and a "big talk" ensued.

Elder Hynes displayed his credentials, and satisfied the Apaches that he was a man of influence among the "Mormoney people."

While the warriors were talking and deliberating, Captain Carron took his nephew aside, for the purpose of learning the true position of affairs and the whereabouts of Clara.

Thus he was able to get several points ahead of Elder Hynes.

Andrew gave his uncle a full and true account of everything that had happened, from his discovery of Clara up to that moment, except the bargain he had made with Francisco de Lerdo.

He wisely thought that it would hardly be politic to mention that matter at all, as he was not yet certain whether it would be more to his advantage to carry out his new contracts or the old ones.

"What people are those who are with Clara?" inquired Captain Carron.

"I don't know them all, uncle. There is Jotham Root, who helped her to escape from Salt Lake, and there is the Mexican who rescued her and Jotham from the Apaches. I can't tell you what his name is, but Red Sleeve says that he is known as The Whip. There are a few others, and I suppose that they are friends of the Mexican or of Gid Gray."

"Gid Gray? Who is he?"

"Old Gid. Haven't you heard of him? There is a big reward offered for him by the Mormons, and I have been setting the Indians on to earn it. Why, uncle, you must have heard of Gid Gray."

"Yes, I have heard of him. And so you have been setting the Indians on to earn that reward?"

"Indeed I have, and it will be a good thing for you if you can get hold of him."

"For me?" You are greatly mistaken. Do you know who Old Gideon is?"

"I only know what I have heard."

"He is Gideon Gray Russell, my own brother-in-law, the brother of Clara's mother."

"The deuce! He is no game for us, then."

"I should say that he is not. I haven't yet fallen so low as to hunt and kill my own kindred. The truth is, Andrew, I am undecided what to do."

"What do you mean, uncle?"

"There has been a change in my ideas, lately. Can you keep a secret, if I tell it to you?"

"I hope so."

"I have lately learned that Clara is an heiress. Her aunt in California, is dead."

"That won't do, uncle," returned Andrew, with a laugh. "That is the very game I fooled her with, and it is played out."

"But what I tell you is true. Her aunt Hannah is dead and has left her a fortune."

"Without any reservation or conditions?"

"With nothing of the kind. The property is hers absolutely, as soon as she can go to California and claim it."

"That is very strange. I am stumped."

"What is the matter, Andrew?"

"The fact is, uncle, I missed one thing in the account I gave you. Francisco de Lerdo—who is a sort of cousin of Clara's you know—came on here in search of her, with a letter from her aunt, inviting her to visit California under his escort."

"What are you giving me, Andrew?"

"That was the story he told at first, and he showed me a letter from Clara's aunt, which made it look all fair and square."

"Go on, and tell me his little game."

"He changed his tune after we were captured, and told me that Mrs. de Lerdo was dead, and that she had left her property to Clara, but on a condition."

"H'm—what was it?"

"That condition was that she should marry her cousin, Francisco de Lerdo. He told it so well that I was strongly inclined to believe him."

"Both stories were lies," promptly replied Mat Carron. "There is no truth in either of them, excepting that Clara's aunt is dead."

"What did he mean, then?"

"His object is plain, and I should think you might have guessed it before now. He is some penniless relation, no doubt, who has had a chance to learn all about the will, and has thought that he could make a speculation by hunting up the heiress and marrying her."

This information necessarily upset Andrew's contract with the Californian; but there were chances in Francisco yet, and Andrew proposed to look after them.

"Don't you believe, uncle," he asked, in a burst of confidence, "that it would be better for her to marry him than that old wretch, Elder Hynes?"

"I do, to tell the truth, and I don't see why she should not marry you in preference to either of them."

This view of the case had evidently not occurred to Andrew before, to judge by the delight with which he received his uncle's unexpected declaration.

It killed and buried his recent friendship for De Lerdo immediately.

"That's a great idea!" he joyfully exclaimed. "It would be a capital way to settle the question, and you may be sure that it would suit me. But you would have to cut loose from the Mormons, uncle Mat."

"That is just what I mean to do, between you and me, and I shall want you to help me."

"You can bet on me all the time. Does Elder Hynes know of the fortune?"

"He has heard the story. I have laughed at it, and have told him that there is no truth in it; but I think he believes it, and that he has come here to make sure of getting possession of Clara."

"We will have to play our cards very carefully, then, as the Indians and the Mormons hold better hands than we hold. De Lerdo will be in the way, but I can set the Apaches on him, and they will make short work of him and be glad of the job."

"Don't it strike you, my boy," remarked Captain Carron, "that you are rather cold-blooded and cruel?"

"I don't care if I am. I hate that fellow. He has lied to me like a dog, and has tried to swindle me."

"We won't bother ourselves about him just yet, Andrew, and I don't think we need be in a hurry to do anything. As you say, we must play our cards very carefully. Here comes Hynes, and he seems to be in great glee."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE.

INSIDE of the stout old ruin it was "all serene" after the failure of the Apache attack.

The little band of white people were thankful for their safety thus far, and proceeded to make arrangements for rest and comfort.

A sleeping-place in one of the interior apartments was prepared for the girls.

Details were made for guards, leaving Frank Ford and Jotham Root out of the count for the present, and all who were not on duty wrapped themselves in their blankets and slept tranquilly.

In the morning inquiry was made concerning water and food for the horses, and Old Gideon proceeded to develop the hidden resources of the ruin.

The well was in plain sight, and it was only necessary to let down a tin cup with a lariat, and to draw up the clear and cold water, which was distributed among those who needed it, until bipeds and quadrupeds had got enough.

This was a tedious process, but the results were quite satisfactory.

Then the old man raked away some rubbish, and lifted a slab of stone from the floor, disclosing an *estufa* or underground apartment, the existence of which had not been suspected by any of his companions.

Descending into this cellar, he hauled up a sack, which proved to be full of shelled corn, and came out, carefully replacing the slab.

"I have been here before, as you may guess," he said in reply to the questioning looks of his friends.

"I thought that this place might serve me some time in case of need, and brought some stuff here, so that I might be able to stand a siege."

"Your thoughtfulness has been a great blessing to us," observed Frank Ford.

"That corn was not all, I had down there, boys; but it is all we need trouble ourselves about just now."

The day passed quietly and not unpleasantly in the ruin.

After their long journey, with its perils and fatigues, the rest which they found there was grateful to all.

The comparative safety which they enjoyed behind those stone walls, although in the presence of their savage enemies, was also appreciated as a great blessing.

The Apaches seemed to have no idea of making another attack upon that apparently impregnable fortification.

They were closely watched by the white men, through a small field glass which Frank Ford carried; but no sign of hostile preparation was visible.

Andrew Carron could be seen among them, with Francisco de Lerdo and Monte Bill.

They were free, moving about the camp as they pleased, apparently on the most friendly terms with the Indians, and there could be no doubt that they had allied themselves with their late captors, for purposes which were by no means friendly to those in the ruin.

As for the Apaches, they had a restless, discontented appearance, which indicated to the experienced eyes of some of the watchers a disposition to raise the siege and abandon the enterprise which had thus far proved so profitless.

"I do believe that those red-skins have had enough of us," observed Gideon after he had carefully watched them for a while.

"That last little affair didn't seem to set well on their stomachs, and they would prefer not to have another dose of the same physic. What do you think of it, Senor Castarra?"

"I am quite of your opinion," answered the Mexican. "They are weary of ill-doing, but are half ashamed to leave us in safety, after all the trouble they have had."

"They will do it, though. They might keep us shut up here and starve us out. That is all we have to fear. But it is not in their nature to do business in that way."

"Such has been my experience of the Apaches."

"An Indian is patient enough in some things; but when it comes to laying siege to such a fort as this, and holding on until sheer starvation forces the garrison to surrender, it seems impossible for them to stick to their work."

"Just so. They are sure to get tired, and to go away in disgust."

"It is queer, but it is always true. I feel sure that they will be far from here before tomorrow's sun rises."

This feeling was shared by all, and it increased the quietude and tranquillity which the party already enjoyed.

It is probable that it would have been justified by the event, had not the arrival of Captain Carron and his followers changed the face of affairs.

In the ruin there was an excitement, occasioned by the appearance of the Mormon party, greater than that in the camp of the Apaches.

The new-comers were hastily viewed through Frank Ford's glass, and were recognized from the walls of the ruin.

Clara Carron at once knew her father, and her emotion at the sight of his familiar features was painfully intense.

Gid Gray muttered a fierce malediction when he beheld the oily countenance of Elder Hynes, and the thunder-cloud of hatred settled darkly on his brow.

Jotham Root recognized some of Captain Car-

ron's followers as well-known Danites, and pointed them out to his companions.

There could be no doubt that the Mormons were there for the purpose of recapturing Clara and taking her back to Salt Lake, and she shuddered and turned pale as she handed the glass to another.

"Do not let it trouble you so much, Clara," entreated Frank Ford. "We will all protect you, and they must kill me, for one, before they can take you back to Salt Lake."

"My life is at your service, senorita," said Cortez Castarra. "Every drop of my blood shall be spilled before they harm you."

"I thank you both," she tearfully answered. "But it pains me more than I can tell you, to feel that I am in such fear of my own father; and that he is pursuing me with the purpose of giving me up to a slavery which would be worse than death."

"It is a bad and hard piece of business as it stands," said Old Gid; "but he has not done that job yet, and there is more than a chance that he won't be able to do it, though I must admit that things don't look as bright as they looked this morning."

"They look worse than ever now," was Clara's disheartening conclusion.

"But we must hope for the best. Whatever your father might be willing to do—and I hope that he is not as bad as he seems to be—it is certain that Abner Hynes will leave nothing untried to get hold of me, as well as of you. He will make the Apaches stick to their work, and they will be apt to starve us out, if they can't do any better."

The general opinion was that the arrival of the Mormon party had changed the situation decidedly for the worse.

But nothing could be done to mend matters, and all waited anxiously for the next move on the part of their enemies.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SMALL GAIN AND GREAT LOSS.

THE next advance toward the *casa grande* fortress was in the shape of a flag of truce.

Monte Bill was the bearer of the flag, and many comments were made upon this proceeding as he approached the ruin.

"I wish that Abner Hynes had come," muttered Gid Gray. "The sneaking skunk! The cowardly coyote! I would have respected the flag by putting a bullet through his black heart."

"I am glad that my father did not come," said Clara. "I think it shows that he is ashamed of the business."

"He is not the only one who is ashamed of it," observed Castarra. "Your California cousin, I think, considers that he has been caught in bad company. The other cousin is probably afraid to come near us. So they have made a messenger of that fellow. Let us hear what he has to say."

Monte Bill was allowed to come within a short distance of the ruin, where he delivered his message.

It was to the effect that Elder Abner Hynes, Captain Mat Carron, and the Apache known as Red Sleeve, in command of the Mormons and Indians in the canyon, demanded the surrender of the young lady named Clara Carron and the outlaw known as Old Gid Gray.

If those persons should be delivered up, the others would be permitted to go in peace, secure from molestation by the Indians.

"Suppose we don't see fit to obey those orders?" mildly responded Frank Ford, who had been detailed to hold the parley on the part of the garrison.

In that event, according to the message brought by Monte Bill, the Mexicans and Indians would treat all within the ruin as enemies, and the men would be turned over to the tender mercies of the Apaches as soon as they were captured.

"Won't you have the kindness to wait until you catch them, before you turn them over to the Indians?" suggested Frank.

The messenger declared that there could be no doubt about the ability of the combined forces to accomplish that object. It might not be an easy matter to take the fortress by storm, but it was certain that the garrison could be starved into submission.

"That is exactly what we don't think about it," replied Frank. "You may go back to those people, and tell them that we all hang together here. If they want any of us, they must come and take us, and they will find such a hot and heavy job that they will be glad to drop it."

Tell Captain Carron that his daughter is very sorry that she is compelled to protect herself against him; but her defenders are able to take care of her and to save her from the fate that would await her at Salt Lake.

"Tell Abner Hynes that Gideon Gray has him now just where he wants him, and that he had better take care of his own head while he is hunting the man whom he calls an outlaw."

"You need not say anything more to us. Go, right along, and tell those white and red scoundrels that there is not much to be gained by trying to shear a wolf."

Frank Ford was highly congratulated, espe-

cially by Clara Carron and Cortez Castarra, upon the firm and defiant tone of his answer to the message from their foes.

Monte Bill returned to the camp of the Apaches, and was supposed to report the result of his mission; but no immediate effects were perceptible.

After a while Captain Carron, accompanied by Elder Hynes and Red Sleeve could be seen walking about the ruin, just out of gunshot, examining it on all sides, apparently with the purpose of deciding where and how an attack might best be made.

It was nearly dark when they had finished their reconnoissance, and they seemed to be in no hurry to act upon the information they had gained.

An event took place, however, before night had fairly shut in the canyon, which relieved the monotony of the siege and terminated in a tragedy.

While the leaders of the besieging forces were on their rounds, a man was seen by the keen-eyed watchers of the ruin, stealing out from the Apache camp toward the pathway that led up the side of the cliff.

His movements were so stealthy, and he was so evidently endeavoring to avoid the observation of his own party, that his proceedings were watched with intense interest.

It was soon discovered that he was a white man, and it was not long before he was recognized as Francisco de Lerdo.

At the same time it was noticed that though he was making use of the scattered rocks and other cover to screen himself from the Apaches and their allies, he did not attempt to keep out of view of those in the ruin.

On the contrary, he looked up at the walls occasionally and made gestures, as if asking aid or expressing friendship.

The supposition was that he was attempting to escape and reach the ruin.

"It looks like it," confessed Old Gideon, when this suggestion was made to him. "If he does mean to do that trick, we ought to try to help him. Two of you stand at the entrance, boys, and watch the chances. But we must be careful; for this may be intended as a game to draw us out and get an advantage of us."

Pedrillo and Jotham stationed themselves at the entrance and looked down the pathway, while the others watched the proceedings from the broken wall.

The Californian continued to work his way among the rocks in the same stealthy and cautious manner, until he had nearly reached the foot of the pathway.

Then his movements were noticed at the Apache camp, and his object was at once guessed.

An outcry was raised, and a dozen Indians started in pursuit of the fugitive, who jumped up suddenly and ran at the top of his speed up the pathway toward the ruin.

But the Apaches were better runners than the Californian, and they gained on him rapidly.

When he was about half-way up the slope they began to fire at him, and he was seen to stop and stagger.

At this his pursuers raised a yell of triumph, and dashed forward to overtake him.

Pedrillo and Jotham, who had been anxiously watching his progress, could wait no longer, but ran down the path to help him.

Two shots from their rifles checked the speed of the Apaches, and De Lerdo stumbled upward to meet them.

As he reached them he fell to the ground, and the Apaches again advanced, yelling and firing.

But the white men in the ruin, headed by Cortez Castarra, had sallied out to the assistance of their friends, and a volley from their rifles sent the Indians whirling toward their camp.

There was no time to be lost, as the whole Apache camp was astir, and Castarra and his comrades hastened to pick up Francisco de Lerdo and carry him into the ruin.

Jotham Root followed them slowly and hesitatingly.

"What is the matter, Jotham?" asked Frank Ford, who noticed that the young man was staggering and breathing hard. "What is the matter? Have you been hurt?"

"Yes, sir. I'm hit—right hard, I reckon."

Frank took his arm and helped him up to the entrance, where he fell.

"Take me to Miss Clara," he said, as they lifted him and carried him in.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PRISONER OF IMPORTANCE.

JOTHAM ROOT was laid on a blanket within the stone house, and Clara hastened to him.

She fell at his side and held his nerveless hand, while her tears were shed freely as she witnessed the condition of the faithful friend who had aided and defended her through so many perils.

Jotham had fainted, and Frank Ford was holding his head and wiping his brow, where the death sweat had already settled.

But he soon opened his eyes, and they shone with a new light as he looked at Clara.

"Kiss me once before I go," he whispered.

Clara bent down and pressed her lips to his, and her tears fell like rain upon his bronzed face.

For a moment his countenance shone as if glorified.

Then his head fell heavily into Frank's arms, and all was over.

Frank Ford laid him down, and left Clara alone with her grief.

"That is a bad piece of business, Frank," said Gid Gray. "I would rather have lost an arm than that brave boy, and our gain won't begin to pay for our loss. How is the other one getting on, Senor Castarra?"

Francisco de Lerdo, it was soon discovered, was badly hurt.

A bullet had struck him in the leg, shattering the bone, and a nearly spent ball had knocked him down and stunned him.

But he soon recovered his consciousness, and his leg was dressed, though it was evident that he could not live long.

As soon as he was able to sit up he proceeded to explain his escape from the Apaches.

"Your father had arrived, Miss Carron," he said, "and a number of Mormons came with him; but you have seen them, I suppose, and know as much about them as I can tell you."

"Yes, we have seen them," answered Clara.

"There are some things, however, which you would not be able to guess at. Do you think, gentlemen, that I can survive that wound?"

Old Gid shook his head.

"Amputation might save you," said the old man; "but we are not able to do that job. I think it right to say that I don't see any hope for you."

"Let it be so. I am of no use in the world, and had better get out of it before I do any more harm. Hear me tell some truths before I go. I must begin, Miss Carron, by confessing that I have not yet told you the truth. I said that I was sent by your aunt to bring you to California; but I was not.

"She is dead, and you are her heiress.

"Your cousin told you the truth as it happened, though he knew nothing about it, as your aunt did not die in New York, but in California.

"I came to this region in the hope that I might find you and induce you to marry me, before telling you of your good fortune; but that is over now.

"Your father has learned of your heirship, and I overheard a conversation between him and your cousin Andrew.

"He now wishes to marry you to Andrew, and wants to get beyond the control of Elder Hynes and the Mormons.

"I do not know how he means to manage that, nor do I believe that he knows.

"But I do know that Andrew meant to get me out of his way, by turning me over to the Indians, as he was afraid that I might reveal something to his uncle that he would not wish to be known.

"When I learned this, I began to think of making my escape, and of casting myself upon the mercy of you and your friends.

"My movements were hastened by seeing Andrew in consultation with one of the Apaches who could speak a little English, and by noticing the glances which they sent in my direction.

"So I deserve no credit for coming and telling you what I know, as I did not come until I was driven to it."

The Californian's voice was growing weaker, and he was faint with pain and loss of blood.

He begged for a little water, which was given to him, and he again tried to speak.

"That is all," he feebly said. "You know how I escaped and what came of it. I am sorry that I caused the death of that young man, who was worth a dozen of me. Can you forgive me for what I have done and meant to do?"

"I can," Clara answered. "I forgive you freely."

"Thank you. I shall die easier for that. I hope that you will get safely out of this trouble, and—"

Faintness prevented him from saying more, and he sunk back in a swoon.

The attention of the men was drawn from the scene by a scream from Ida Russell.

Brave as Ida was in action, she feared to look upon the face of the dead, and she had withdrawn in terror from the presence of the dying man.

She had retreated to the inner apartment, where she was seated in a corner, trembling and sobbing.

While she was in that position she heard a grating and scratching noise on the outside of the building.

She looked, but there was nothing to be seen, and she was sure that the wall on that side was an effectual protection from their enemies.

But the grating and scratching noise continued, and presently a man's face was thrust in at the opening which had been left in the wall to serve the purpose of a window.

It was this sudden appearance that forced a scream from her.

The next moment she had seized her rifle, and there she stood, as courageous as ever in the

presence of a real danger, confronting the intruder.

The face was that of a white man, and its expression was not hostile, but conciliatory and beseeching.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" boldly demanded the girl.

"That can't be Clara," said the man. "Where is Clara? I want to see her."

At this juncture the defenders of the ruin rushed in, headed by Harry Ford.

Among the first was Gid Gray, who instantly recognized the face at the opening.

"Is that you, Mat Carron?" he demanded.

"What do you want here?"

"I want to see Clara," was the answer. "I want to talk to her and the rest of you. It is for your good that I have come here."

"Are you alone?"

"Quite alone."

"You may come in then, if you can get in."

As Captain Carron squeezed in at the opening and dropped down into the apartment, Frank Ford stirred up the little fire that was burning there, so that they might have a better look at him.

His appearance was not prepossessing just then. He had a shame-faced, hang-dog sort of a look, as of a man who had been caught in a business in which he ought not to have engaged.

He glanced at the faces about him, without really looking at any, and again asked for Clara.

"She is near at hand," answered Old Gideon.

"But you must tell me what you want before you can see her."

"She is my daughter," replied Captain Carron, with some show of anger. "Is not that enough?"

"It would be, if you had treated her as a father should treat a daughter. But you have forfeited your claim to respect and obedience from her, and I don't believe she is disposed to acknowledge it at present."

"Indeed, sir?"

"That is the truth. You have sold her to the Mormons, and have come here for the purpose of fulfilling your contract and forcing her into slavery."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Russell. I know that I have done her a wrong; but I want to right the wrong, and that is the purpose which has brought me here. Let me see her, and I will tell her what I mean. I am only one man, and you must know that I am powerless to harm her or any of you."

"We mean to make sure of that; but you may see Clara, if she is willing to see you."

Old Gideon requested Frank Ford to bring in Clara.

But she had been listening, and just then she stepped in and stood before her father, without going to him or even offering him her hand.

Captain Carron was really moved at the sight of his child, and he began to speak, in a sorrowful and hesitating manner, of the wrong he had intended her; but he had repented of that, he said, and was there with the object of helping her. He had a plan by which he hoped to rescue her and her friends from their perilous position.

"Perhaps your plan might not suit me and my friends," coldly answered Clara. "I have heard something of it from Francisco de Lerdo."

"Is he here?" demanded Captain Carron. "I thought he was killed by the Apaches in attempting to escape."

"He is dead here, and with him and for him died one of the best and truest young men that ever breathed. But De Lerdo lived long enough to tell me that you now intend to marry me to my cousin, Andrew Carron."

"Did he tell you that?" cried Mat Carron.

"I will not say that he lies—"

"No—please don't say it. He would not be likely to tell me a falsehood with his dying breath. He also informed me of the death of my aunt, and perhaps it is that which has caused this change in your feelings."

"No matter what caused the change, Clara. I assure you that there is a change, and that I am here to help you. Elder Hynes insisted upon coming with me from Salt Lake, and I could not prevent him from doing so; but he is no friend of mine, and you shall not go back there with him."

"I am sure of that, while my friends live," replied Clara as she glanced at Frank Ford and Cortez Castarra.

"But you and your friends are in trouble. You are surrounded by an overwhelming force, and they will be sure to capture you unless you have aid from some quarter. I can help you out of this difficulty, and I only ask that I may be allowed to do so."

Clara looked at Gideon Gray as if questioning whether she should listen further.

"When it comes to that," observed the old man, "I am the commander of the forces here, and you may state your proposition to me."

"Very well. I may say to you, Russell, that Elder Hynes is exciting the Apaches, by the promise of a large reward, to take your life, and has tried to set me on with the same purpose. But I have not fallen so low as to hunt my own kindred for money."

"I am glad to hear you say *that*, anyhow."
 "I have brought with me six men, whom I chose because I knew that they would be faithful to me whatever might happen, and in spite of the authority of Elder Hynes. If I and those six were with you, you might safely defy the Apaches. Without us, or if we were on the other side, your fate would soon be settled. I caused it to be understood, when I left the camp, that I was going to scout and spy about this ruin, for the purpose of deciding how an attack should be made."

"I now propose to go back and tell the Apaches that my search has been successful, and to show them where to make an attack on this side of the river, while I and my men storm the entrance on the western side. When we come up the slope, you must allow us to pass in, and then I will be free from the Mormons and the Apaches, and you will have seven or eight good fighting men added to your forces. When the Indians learn what has happened, they will abandon the siege and leave Elder Hynes in the lurch."

Clara's eyes brightened, and all looked anxiously at Gideon, to see what answer he would make to this proposition.

"That sounds very fair, Captain Carron," said the old man, deliberately. "Indeed, it is quite plausible. But I have not the least idea, so far as I am concerned, of accepting your offer."

"Why not?" demanded Mat Carron, in utter astonishment.

"I suppose you have read of the siege of Troy, and of the wooden horse that was admitted within the walls of the city."

"What has that to do with this business?"

"The wooden horse, as you remember, proved to be full of armed men. The Greeks thus gained an entrance which they could not have effected in any other way, and the city fell. I am afraid that your seven or eight fighting men would prove to be more than a match for us. With them in the ruin, and the Apaches outside, it would soon be all up with us."

"Do you suppose that I would be guilty of such treachery?" indignantly demanded Captain Carron.

"As Patrick Henry remarked, we have no way of judging of the future but by the past. For my part, I would never trust a Mormon or a man who has been trusted by the Mormons. I prefer to hold a bird in the hand, rather than let it go for the chance of two in the bush. But, I am only one man here. You can ask the others, and I must be governed by their decision."

"My opinion coincides with that of Mr. Gray," promptly remarked Frank Ford.

"And so does mine," added Cortez Castarra.

"And mine," joined in Harry Ford and Pedrillo, heartily.

"But what will you do?" demanded Captain Carron. "The Apaches are here in overwhelming numbers. If my men should help them, there can be no chance for you."

"We have already considered that," answered the undaunted old man.

"Even if you should resist an attack, they can starve you out. What will you do for food for yourselves and your horses?"

"We have considered that question also. We don't intend to tell all we know."

"What shall I do, then?"

"You will stay where you are. If we cannot gain one friend, we will at least get rid of one enemy by holding you as a prisoner. If you bring forth fruit meet for repentance, we may allow you to help us."

"I will try to be thankful for that much."

"But it will be for us to direct the time and the manner. That question is settled, Captain Carron, and now we must bury our dead."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HARD AND HOT WORK.

MAT CARRON was quite crestfallen and dejected at the untoward result of his attempted negotiation.

He perceived that he was distrusted and despised, and that his offers of assistance, whether fairly meant or not, were spurned and put aside.

He was given to understand that he must consider himself a prisoner.

He would not be bound, or in any way restrained, as long as he should obey orders; but it would not be safe for him to attempt to leave the ruin.

Clara gave him one wistful glance, but choked down whatever filial feelings remained to her, and turned and followed the others to the apartment in which the dead men lay.

She, too, was against him; she, too, distrusted and despised him; and why should she not?

Surely she had better cause than any of the others to feel that he was her foe, and to doubt his professions of friendship.

If he was really honest and in earnest in the professions and the propositions he had made, it must hurt him severely to see with how little consideration that proposition was treated, and how little faith his promises received.

But he could not justly blame Clara, whom

he had driven from him, nor the others, who knew of his evil conduct and his past associations.

Silently he followed her and her friends into the apartment in which lay the bodies of Jotham Root and Francisco de Lerdo, covered with one blanket, and silently he watched the preparations for their interment.

He could not help feeling that he was indirectly responsible for the deaths of those men, as well as for the difficulties in which their living companions were involved.

The rubbish was cleared away from a corner of the ruin, and a hole was made there, in which the two bodies were buried, amid the tears of the women, and with an attempt at a burial service by Frank Ford.

Mat Carron might have slipped out and made his escape while this sorrowful work was being done.

The entrance was then unguarded, and it was not probable that any of the men in the ruin would shoot him down if he should run; but he made no such attempt.

He seemed determined to remain, and to fulfill the condition imposed upon him by his brother-in-law, by bringing forth fruit meet for repentance.

The Apaches had been remarkably quiet since the escape of De Lerdo.

It was supposed that they were waiting for the information which their spy was expected to bring.

If so, it was likely that they would become weary of waiting.

If they were preparing to make an attack, or if they had any hostile design on foot, nothing could be seen or heard that would give their adversaries a chance to guess at it.

The night was intensely dark.

Though the sky was clear, as it usually was in that latitude, the pale rays of the stars availed little to light up the gloomy recesses of that deep canyon, and the camp of the Apaches was shrouded by such a dense veil of darkness that it was entirely invisible to those in the ruin.

This thick darkness and its accompanying silence made it all the more necessary that the beleaguered white men should be on their guard against a surprise or some other stealthy movement on the part of their wily foes.

Their forces, sadly diminished by the loss of one brave and reliable man, were posted in the most available positions, and it was determined that no eyes should be closed for slumber that night, except those of the girls, who might sleep if they could.

But the danger came in a new and unexpected manner, and from an unexpected quarter.

Captain Carron, as it happened, had been secretly followed by Red Sleeve, who had seen him climb the eastern wall of the ruin and enter an opening.

The chief had waited for the spy until he was tired of waiting, and had then returned to the camp.

As Captain Carron did not come back as he had promised to, the Apaches naturally concluded that he had been killed or captured.

They also concluded that it would be as easy for them to climb the wall and enter the ruin, as it had been for the spy to do so.

A party was organized, accordingly, to surprise the white people and get possession of their stronghold.

Andrew Carron and the Mormons were not invited to take part in this enterprise, nor were they disposed to volunteer.

They talked the matter over among themselves, and were of the opinion that their leader might have returned if he had wished to.

As he had remained at the ruin, he probably had a good reason for doing so, and they thought it best to await further developments.

The intent of the Apaches was not made apparent until after midnight, at the hour when all mankind are supposed to be enjoying their soundest slumber.

The apartment in which Ida Russell had been seated when she was surprised by Mat Carron, was not that in which the girls slept, and it was unoccupied while the men were keeping watch for their enemies at other parts of the ruin.

When the Apaches had climbed the eastern wall, following the example of their scout, they looked in at the opening, and saw this apartment untenanted, with no sign of life but the smoldering remnant of a fire.

Mat Carron, who had not been trusted with a rifle, or requested to assist in the defense of the fortress, occupied himself in lounging about, without speaking to any one or being spoken to, and generally keeping near the entrance to the apartment in which his daughter and Ida Russell were supposed to be resting.

As he was moodily standing there, he heard a slight scratching noise in the vacant room, followed by a thud, as if some person had jumped down upon the ground.

Instantly guessing what had happened, the Danite captain rushed in there, and found himself confronted by a brawny and half-naked savage, whose greasy skin and painted face shone horribly in the dim light of the expiring fire.

At the opening was the head of another, who was just in the act of entering.

The first Apache uttered a grunt, which might have betokened either surprise or anger, as he recognized the white man before him, and he seemed uncertain what to do.

His uncertainty was quickly ended by Mat Carron, who drew a knife from his belt, and rushed upon him with deadly intent.

Again and again the white man plunged his knife into the breast of his foe; but the Apache clinched him, pulling him down in his own fall, and the struggle was continued among the scattered embers of the fire.

The other Apache, anxious to take part in the contest that was going on below, squeezed through the opening, and jumped down into the apartment.

He drew his knife as he touched the ground, and pounced upon Captain Carron, who was striving to extricate himself from the death grasp of his antagonist.

The victory was then with the Apache; but his triumph was short-lived.

Ida Russell stood in the doorway, with her rifle in her hand, and her bullet crashed through the brain of the savage as he rose.

Harry Ford came running in, followed by the others, and he was in time to put a stop to the progress of a third Apache, who was pressing in at the opening above.

But those who had tried to force themselves into the ruins were not the only Indians who had climbed the eastern wall.

Others had swarmed up to the top, and the white men were hastily called upon to meet a new and formidable demonstration.

Half of the ruin, as has been noticed, was covered by the rubbish of the second story, upheld by heavy beams; but the greater part of the other half was open to the sky.

The Apaches considered themselves so safe in the position they had gained, that they did not hesitate to yell and shout to their comrades in the canyon.

They also menaced the open part of the building, so that the white men could not stir from their shelter without exposing themselves to a fire from above.

This was a serious emergency for Old Gideon and his followers, and they held a hasty consultation to decide what should be done.

"Those red-skins have the whip-hand of us now," said the old man, "and I don't see how we are to get out of the scrape. I can't understand what they say, but I believe they are calling to their friends, directing them how to get up, or telling them to charge along the pathway, as they know that we can't defend the entrance now. We are sure to be shut up here now, like rats in a hole."

"There is only one thing to be done," was the opinion of Cortez Castarra. "We must get rid of those fellows on the roof."

This was easier to say than to do, and his companions looked at the Mexican in astonishment, awaiting an explanation.

"I have been up there in the daylight," he continued, "and I understand the position. The Apaches, to judge by the sound of their voices, are on the south side. There is a hole in the north side, at which we can climb out without being observed. I propose, Mr. Ford, that you and Pedrillo shall go up there with me, leaving the others below to take care of the ladies."

"We will do it," instantly answered Frank. "The case is desperate, and we must risk everything for ourselves, as well as for the others."

Castarra crawled up through the opening he had spoken of, followed by his two comrades.

Issuing out upon the top of the building, they found themselves screened from the view of the Apaches by a piece of broken wall and a pile of rubbish.

Cautiously and silently they worked their way to the wall, and looked over their foes.

Half a dozen Apaches had reached the top of the ruins, and were there in full sight, within a few feet of the rifles of the three daring whites.

Some of them were standing up, shouting to their comrades in the canyon, and others were kneeling down, endeavoring to get a shot at their enemies below.

Castarra and his companions aimed carefully, knowing that their lives and those of their friends depended upon sure shooting, and the Mexican gave the word to fire.

The three rifles cracked together, and three Apaches fell in the agonies of death.

Instantly the white men sprung over the wall, firing their revolvers in the faces of their astonished foes.

Two of the remaining Apaches fell under their fire; but the third grappled with Pedrillo, and there was a deadly struggle at the edge of the ruin.

Though Castarra at once rushed forward to the help of his friend and comrade, the two were so interlocked and twisted together that he could not fire at one without running the risk of killing the other.

As he stooped to seize them both, they writhed out of his reach, and Pedrillo and the savage rolled off together, falling down to the base of the ruin, and thence over the bluff, fully sixty feet to the bottom of the canyon.

There was no other casualty among the conquerors, though both the survivors had been slightly injured; but the loss of Pedrillo was a terrible blow to Cortez Castarra.

The gallant Mexican gazed vainly down into the depths of the canyon, and moaned audibly as he turned away, knowing that his friend could not have survived that fall.

From this indulgence in grief he was recalled by an alarm below, and he hurried down with Frank Ford, taking the weapons of the dead Apaches.

This alarm was caused by an onslaught of the Indians in the canyon, who had rushed up the pathway that led to the ruin, probably in accordance with the directions of their friends who had gained the top.

If they expected to find the entrance undefended, and to receive assistance from within, they were terribly disappointed, as they were met by a severe and well-directed fire, which sent them howling back to their camp.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

AFTER the last repulse it was evident that the efforts of the Apaches were exhausted for the night.

But the defenders of the ruin kept a careful watch at all points until daylight, when they came together to note their losses and consult upon the situation.

There were only five men left.

The deaths of Jotham Root and Pedrillo had made a sad gap in their ranks, and Captain Carron had also died in defending them.

In this respect, at least, there could be no doubt of his fidelity, and Clara, who had covered his remains with a blanket, bitterly bewailed his loss.

"He was my father, and he is dead," she said in reply to the attempted consolations of her friends.

"I know that he tried to do me a great wrong; but he repented of that, and his last act proved that his repentance was sincere. We were wrong to distrust him and put him aside as we did, and that is what hurts me. If I could only have spoken to him before he died, to tell him that I forgave him and loved him, I might have borne this better."

Gid Gray, who had not believed that there was much good in his brother-in-law that was worth saving, did not attempt to restrain her tears, but waited until the violence of her emotion had abated, and then suggested that it was necessary to bury the dead.

The rubbish was removed from another corner of the ruin, and a hole was made there, in which the body of Matthew Carron was buried, wrapped in a blanket.

Then the men looked about, to observe the appearance of affairs, and to consider what should next be done.

The Apaches were secure in their encampment and there was no sign of activity among them.

Severe as their losses had been, their numbers were not perceptibly diminished, and there could be no doubt of their ability to overwhelm the few defenders of the ruin, if they should stick to their work.

As Elder Hynes was there to hold them to it, they could not be expected to abandon the siege, especially as the Mormons, in view of the continued absence of Captain Carron, would probably acknowledge the elder's leadership.

All this was duly considered and discussed by the five remaining white men, who were obliged to admit that their case looked desperate indeed, and no one could suggest a remedy that would meet the emergency.

Escape was out of the question, as it would be impossible to get up or down the canyon without passing through the hostile camp.

There was evidently nothing to do but to defend the position as long as they could, and in that direction the prospect was as hopeless as in any other.

"One thing will interfere seriously with that plan," observed Frank Ford. "Our supply of bullets has run short. For my part, I am entirely out."

"We must run some more," suggested Old Gideon.

"Where is the lead to come from?"

"There's a number of bars in the *estufa*. I brought them here and stowed them away some time ago."

"You seem to have provided well against a siege."

"It was necessary that I should do so, as I expected to be obliged to retreat to this place some day. Suppose you go down and get some lead, while Harry stirs up the fire."

Frank lighted a torch, and descended into the underground apartment, following the directions of Gray.

"You will find the lead at the north end," said the old man. "It is concealed under some loose stones. Be careful how you manage that torch, as there is a keg of powder in the southeast corner."

"I will be careful," Frank answered, as he quickly moved away from the southeast corner, and began to search for the lead.

He was so long engaged in the search, with-

out reporting any results, that the old man became impatient and called him, asking him if he could not find the lead.

"Yes, I have found it," answered Frank.

"Hand it up, then, and let us get at work."

"In a moment. There is a light coming through a hole in the stone here, and I want to know what it means."

"Never mind the light. Hand us up a few bars of lead, and then you may do as you please."

Frank did as he was requested to do, and immediately returned to his occupation of pulling down stones and throwing them aside.

"What's that you say about a light down there?" called out Old Gideon.

Frank pulled out a large stone and uttered a joyful cry.

"It is the light of day!" he shouted. "It comes from the outside. I do believe that there is a chance to get out and away from this place."

"That can't be true."

"But it is true. There is a large flat stone standing up here. If I had somebody to help me, I think I could pull it down, and then we would know where the light comes from."

Cortez Castarra jumped down into the *estufa*, and went to the assistance of his friend, who had made quite a pile of the stones which he had pulled out of the north end of the underground chamber.

By the light of the torch they saw before them a high and broad flat stone, standing upright, which seemed to be loose since Frank had removed the rubbish from about it.

Castarra also saw the light streaming in at the edge of the stone, and his excitement soon equaled that which Frank had shown.

They took hold of the stone together, and pulled at it vigorously.

It soon came out and fell on the floor of the *estufa*, disclosing an opening large enough for a man to pass through.

Frank darted through this opening, and found himself in a narrow passage.

It could not be called light, except by comparison with the darkness of the chamber from which he had emerged.

Castarra followed him to take a view of the passage, and then both ran back into the *estufa*, where their joyful cries called down Gid Gray.

The old man was almost as much stirred up by the information they gave him as they were by what they had seen.

The passage, in fact, was one of those wonderful breaks in the geologic formation which are of frequent occurrence in that region, being a miniature representation of the great canyon in which the ruin was situated.

A slender thread of a stream, working and wearing its way during unknown ages, had cut through the sandstone nearly to the bottom of the big canyon.

Then, having finished its task of drainage, the stream had ceased to flow, leaving something for future explorers to wonder at and attribute to volcanic action, to the cooling of the earth's surface, or to any cause but the right one.

The builders of the *casa grande*, taking advantage of this miniature canyon, had erected their habitation, or fortress, or whatever it might have been, right at its entrance, where the sides approached each other at the top so closely that scarcely a crevice was visible.

Toward the bottom they spread out; but the canyon was closed up by the walls of the building, with the exception of an opening at the *estufa*, which had been left for the purpose of a secret way of entrance or retreat in case of imminent danger, and which had been kept concealed until Frank Ford found it.

Into this passage Old Gideon pressed with his companions, and he did not attempt to conceal his surprise at what he saw.

The miniature canyon was not much more than wide enough to permit the passage of a horse, but was so high—its perpendicular sides reaching upward hundreds of feet—that there were times when the stars could be seen at mid-day from the bottom.

It was impossible to say how far it might reach; but there could be no doubt that an outlet would be found somewhere.

"This gives us safety," said Gid Gray, at last, as he drew a long breath of relief.

"I had noticed the break in the rock above, but had never supposed that an opening could be found down here. As you say, Frank, we can get out and away from this place, and those red wretches will know nothing about it until they come and find us missing."

"But where will we come out?" asked Frank.

"Somewhere. We need give ourselves no trouble about that. We may be sure that we are not the first who have used this cut."

"But we will be afoot wherever we come out. We will be obliged to leave our horses here."

"I don't know why we should. I was expecting to take them with us."

"How can we do that? This opening can be enlarged, no doubt; but how are we to get the horses down to it?"

"You ought to be enough of an engineer to answer that question for yourself. We have dug holes to bury our dead, and we can dig a way down to the *estufa*. But it will be hard work, and we must set about it at once."

"Indeed we must, and we will need to work with a will."

"If you and Senor Castarra will enlarge the opening here, the rest of us will begin work on the grades."

Gid Gray ascended to the upper floor, and told his waiting and wondering friends of the fortunate discovery that had been made down below.

They were rejoiced beyond measure, and the girls knelt down and thanked God for the prospect of deliverance.

No time was lost then.

Old Gideon and Harry Ford and Perry Wessel at once began to dig a sloping pathway, by which to take the horses down into the *estufa*.

Clara was set at molding bullets, and Ida was stationed where she could watch all the movements of the enemy.

In the course of an hour, Frank Ford and Castarra came up from below, covered with dust and dirt.

They had enlarged the opening sufficiently to allow the horses to pass out into the narrow canyon, and they brought a fresh supply of hope and energy to the assistance of their companions.

The five men worked with a will, and before noon the interior of the ruin had been torn up, and the grade to the *estufa* was completed.

Ida, whose bright eyes had never relaxed their vigilance, reported that all was quiet in the camp of the Apaches, and that there were no signs of a movement.

Clara had run a large supply of bullets, which were divided among the men, and preparations were made for immediate departure.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OLD GIDEON'S LAST STROKE.

As there were then but seven persons in the party, there was a horse for each of them.

The corn that remained in the *estufa* was loaded upon three of the stoutest horses, and all the vessels in which water could be carried were filled at the well.

In a little while everything was ready for a start.

But Frank Ford was not satisfied, and he looked about with a dubious air.

"There is one thing that troubles me," said he. "The Apaches will be able to follow us, and they may overtake us as they did before."

"I have thought of that," remarked Gideon. "Did I not tell you that there is a keg of powder here?"

"Yes; but what of that?"

"I mean to use it."

"What? Do you mean to blow up the concern?"

"That is just what I mean to do. The explosion will fill up the mouth of the little canyon, if it does nothing more."

Perry Wessel, who had climbed the wall to take a last look at the Apache camp, reported that their enemies were stirring, and that there was evidently a movement of some sort on foot.

Clara and Ida were anxious to leave the place at once, and Old Gideon directed their escorts to take them on into the little canyon.

"But what will you do, father?" demanded Ida.

"I want to stay here a few minutes," he said, "to see what those Apaches mean to do. If they will have the kindness to come and take possession of our fort as soon as we leave it, my explosion will be worth something, and there is a chance that Abner Hynes may be in the crowd."

Clara shuddered as she noticed the tigerish gleam in the old man's eyes.

She did not know how vengeful and cruel a man can become, when he has become outlawed and hunted by those who have done him a deadly wrong.

But she did not allow any feeling of fear or anxiety to mar the pleasure she found in being able to escape from her great peril, and she and Ida were loud in their expressions of wonder and delight when they were clear of the ruin, and fairly within the narrow canyon.

When they had reached that part of the pass where it was open to the light of day, they halted, to wait for Gid Gray and Perry Wessel.

Those two had important and serious business to attend to just then.

The old man looked over the wall until he formed his own idea of the probable movements of the Apaches.

They had divided into three parties, which took positions on each of the three sides of the ruin.

Among them were the Mormons, and Elder Hynes was conspicuous there, seeming to urge them forward.

Then a single warrior separated himself from each party, and approached the ruin stealthily, as if with the intention of scouting, availing

themselves of all the cover they could find on the way.

Having convinced himself that the Apaches were about to make a serious attempt to capture the fortress, Old Gideon left Perry Wessel to watch in his place, and descended into the *estufa*, where he prepared his powder magazine for the explosion to which he meant to treat his enemies.

In the course of fifteen or twenty minutes Wessel reported that the scouts were within a short distance of the ruin, and that the Apaches and their allies were advancing toward it in three bodies.

The old man then directed him to come down from his post, and to take the two remaining horses into the little canyon.

"You had better go right on, my friend, and overtake the others," said Gid Gray, when he had assisted Wessel through the passage with the horses.

"Those red-skins will soon find out that there is nobody here to resist them, and they will swarm into the ruin. I can lay a train in a few minutes, and then I will be ready for them. I only hope that Abner Hynes will be at the head of the gang. And soon as this work is done I will come and join you.

Perry Wessel gladly did as he was directed to do.

He soon overtook the others, to whom he gave a brief account of the condition of affairs at the ruin.

Ida was so deeply troubled because her father had been left there alone, that Wessel determined to go back and remain with him until his work should be finished.

Gid Gray had arranged his powder to suit him, and had covered it with stones and rubbish, and had then laid a train a short distance within the little canyon.

All things having been made ready, he was about to go up into the ruin to see what had become of the Apaches, when a guttural exclamation above told him that at least one of them had effected an entrance.

He then retreated within the passage, where he stood ready to fire his train, and it was there that Perry Wessel found him.

The first Indian who made his way into the ruin quickly discovered that it was untenanted, and conveyed the information to his comrades.

Then the Apaches hastened to pour into the fort which had so stoutly resisted and defied them.

Looking about, to ascertain how and in what direction their enemies had escaped, they saw the passage that had been cut down into the *estufa*, and it puzzled them soundly.

There could be no doubt that the white people had gone down into that hole; but for what purpose had they gone there, and where were they concealed?

It could not reasonably be supposed that they would evacuate such a strong position, except to establish themselves in one that was yet stronger.

Therefore the Apaches shrunk back from the hole that yawned before them, unable to guess what infernal artifice might have been contrived to take them out of the world.

Within the little canyon, some thirty yards from the wall of the *casa grande*, Gid Gray waited in concealment, ready to fire the train at the moment when the explosion might do the most damage.

Further on, and just in sight of him, was Perry Wessel, mounted on his horse, and holding another for the accommodation of the Guy Fawkes who was to fire the train.

It was useless for him to go any nearer, as he would be unable to aid the old man, and it was the part of prudence to keep himself out of the reach of danger.

Gid Gray, listening intently to all the sounds that came from the upper part of the ruin, plainly heard the voice of Elder Hynes, urging the Apaches to explore the ruin and pursue their hidden enemies.

The old man's eyes glistened in the dim light of the passage.

Then he shouted, in shrill and piercing tones, that penetrated to every part of the ruin:

"Abner Hynes! Gideon Gray is safe, and you are going to hell right now!"

At this cry several Indians rushed down into the *estufa*, and there saw the passage through which the fugitives had escaped.

As they raised a yell of triumph at this discovery, the old man touched his torch to his train of powder, and started to run.

The explosion followed almost instantly.

It was not very loud, and but a small portion of its effect was visible within the narrow canyon.

There was a dull, heavy roar, and then the air was full of dust and flying stones and rubbish.

With this came yells and shrieks of agony and terror, followed by a confused shouting here and there, but nothing that was plain and distinct except the fact that some people had fallen victims to the terrible gunpowder plot.

The truth was that but few of them within the walls had escaped alive, and none of them were uninjured.

The shattered ruin had fallen in all directions, and great masses of stones and rubbish had covered those who were in the *estufa*, completely blocking up the entrance to the narrow canyon.

But these were not the only effects of the explosion.

A portion of the sand rock that formed the sides of the little canyon jarred and loosened by the violent tremors of earth and air, fell down with a thundering crash, choking up the canyon and filling it with clouds of dust.

Gid Gray, as he was flying from the scene of devastation, was caught and crushed by the falling mass.

Perry Wessel was so astonished, if not terrified, by this result of the explosion, that for a few moments he was unable to move.

If it had been absolutely necessary for his safety, he could not have stirred a step, and his horse had caught the same infection.

When the cloud of dust had partially settled, so that he could dimly see his way, he dismounted and walked to the pile of broken rock that blocked up the canyon.

Old Gid was not to be seen; but Wessel had not expected to see him, as his eyes had been fixed on the old man when a mass of rock struck him and crushed him to the ground.

Perry Wessel looked for him and called to him, not with any hope of seeing him or receiving a reply, but as a sort of dismal duty that must be performed.

There was no answer to his call—not even a moan—and he could see nothing but the pile of rock and the floating dust.

There could be no doubt that the old man was buried there.

There could also be no doubt that the canyon was so effectually stopped up, by the ruins of the *casa grande*, and by the fallen masses of rock, that pursuit of the fugitives by the Apaches was an impossibility.

There was nothing for Wessel to do but ride on and overtake his friends, to whom he should tell the sad story of this latest loss, as well as the good news of their entire safety.

As they were riding very slowly, he overtook them in less than an hour.

The riderless horse which he led necessarily suggested to them the nature of the calamity of which he was afraid to inform them.

They halted until he came up, when their looks asked him the question which they were unwilling to put to him.

Ida Russell's pale face and trembling form showed that she anticipated the answer, as she gazed anxiously at the led horse with the empty saddle.

"Thar ain't no use in holdin' back nothin'," stammered Perry Wessel. "You all know that thar's suthin' wrong, and that somebody ain't with me who ort to ha' come. The fact is, folks, that the blowin'-up business was too much fur the old man, and that he is dead an' buried under the pile that he flung down atop himself."

Ida reeled in her saddle, and would have fallen from her horse had not Harry Ford passed his strong arm around her and held her in her place.

Perry Wessel told the story of the explosion and of the death of the old man who had buried himself in the same destruction which he had brought upon his enemies.

"Thar's one good thing about it," said the narrator in conclusion. "Thar's been a tremendous scatteration among the red-skins, and I've a notion that old Hynes was among them that got thar dose."

"That is comforting, at least," observed Frank Ford.

"Thar's another good thing. The canyon is blocked up so that them as was left alive won't be able to git at us by no manner o' means. So we kin take things easy and go along as we please."

The day was nearly spent when Perry Wessel overtook the party, and there seemed to be no end to the canyon.

As all were worn out and broken down, by loss of sleep and by the emotions attending the recent exciting events, it was thought best to stop when they reached a water-hole, and to rest until morning.

CHAPTER XL.

A CITY ON A HILL.

AT an early hour in the morning the remaining members of the fugitive band were astir and pressing on, anxious to get clear of the canyon, though they no longer had any fear of a pursuing foe.

Sadly but hopefully they rode onward, mourning the friends who had fallen, while they rejoiced in their own escape from such deadly peril.

The canyon opened out as they advanced, growing wider and shallower, and the sun was not yet three hours high when they finally came to the end of it.

There they looked out upon a broad and sandy plain.

In the plain was a peculiar object widely unlike any thing they had seen in the course of their journey.

At a distance of less than half a mile from the mouth of the canyon was a broad and flat rock, or a mountain razed, having the appearance of a truncated cone.

On this rock or mountain was situated a town, composed of lofty stone houses, surrounded by a high wall.

It did not differ much from the towns that were to be seen in the country of the Moquis or other Pueblo Indians, except in one striking particular.

The travelers had hitherto been journeying in a sandstone country, but had now entered a region in which the formation was exclusively limestone.

The houses and the wall of the town before them were built of limestone, which shone and glistened in the rays of the morning sun, presenting a weird and fairy-like appearance.

It seemed to them that it could be nothing less than a magical city, which had suddenly risen out of the desert waste.

The travelers halted and stared at it in amazement, wondering if it were not one of the pictures of the mirage, such as had often been witnessed on those sandy plains.

After discussing the question a few minutes, without reaching any reasonable conclusion, they rode forward.

As they approached the "city on a hill" they were forced to believe that it was real—no optical illusion, no picture of the mirage, no work of magic, but a real walled town, built by hands, of commonplace materials, and inhabited by human beings.

There was, indeed, nothing so very extraordinary about it, except the white and shining appearance which had at first struck them, and the fact that it had been a surprise to them to find it there.

"I have been through one of the Moqui towns," said Frank Ford, "and this seems to be not unlike it in any important particulars. If your father had lived, Ida, he would probably be able to tell us something about it."

"I have heard of such a town," remarked Castarra; "but I have never before been so high up into the Navajo country. If my friend Pedrillo had not died, we might rely upon him for information."

"We can see what the town is, plain enough," observed Perry Wessel. "The great moral question is, what sort of folks is inside of it? They can't be Moquis—that we all know—and they're most likely to be Navajoes. Now, some o' them Navajoes is peaceable enough, and others ain't to be depended on. Fur my part, I ain't ashamed to say that I've got my suspicions of that place."

"Surely," said Clara, "the people who would build such a town as that cannot be savages, and I am not afraid that they would harm us."

It was finally settled that the party should go no nearer to the town on the rock than was absolutely necessary, but should endeavor to pass around it and proceed on their journey without attracting the attention of its inhabitants.

The only question was whether they would be allowed to do so.

This question was answered in the negative, soon after they had resumed their journey, by a strange procession that issued forth from the town.

A gate was thrown open on the side that faced the canyon, and the procession came streaming out at the gate.

At the same time a number of people appeared on the walls and the tops of the houses.

The procession seemed to be composed entirely of men.

Those in the front ranks were clothed in long white robes, and carried no weapons of any kind.

The others were dressed in short tunics, and were armed with spears, swords and bows.

They descended a winding path that had been cut in the rock, and came out upon the plain, their line of march intercepting the course of the party of white people.

"What is to be done now?" asked Clara. "We surely will not be able to avoid those people."

"It will be a difficult thing to do, to say the least of it," answered Frank Ford, "unless we should turn back into the canyon, and we would find no outlet there. We might fight them, and could probably make a great slaughter among them; but the chances are that they would capture us in the end."

"Why should we think of doing anything of the kind?" demanded Ida Russell. "It can hardly be possible, after we have been brought through such great perils, that fortune will turn against us now."

"That sounds reasonable enough," said Frank. "Those people are surely coming to meet us," declared Ida, "and I see no reason to believe that their intentions are not friendly."

"I hope you are right, Miss Ida," said Castarra, "and I am inclined to believe that you are. Whether you are right or wrong, we must not run the risk of trying to escape from that throng, or of fighting our way through it. As those people appear to be peaceable, we have nothing to do but to go forward and meet them peaceably."

As the procession came nearer it could be seen

that the men were of large stature and splendid form, that their skins were dark, and that they were unmistakably Indians, though of a different type from any our travelers had yet encountered.

At the head was an old man, with long, white hair, who carried in his right hand a gilded staff, and whose robes were thickly covered with gold embroidery and barbaric ornaments of gold and silver, prominent among which were images of the sun.

"We have fallen upon a city of sun-worshippers, and that old man is a priest," exclaimed Castarra. "I have heard of such places before now. We must pray that the stories which I have heard, of human sacrifices to their deity, may not prove to be as true as what we see before us."

There was no reply to this, as all were intently occupied in watching the procession, and in studying the faces of those singular Indians, which seemed to be lighted up by an expression of triumphant joy.

When they had come close to the party of white people, the old man halted, prostrating himself upon the sand, and his example was imitated by all his followers.

Cortez Castarra, who rode in the advance, addressed them in Spanish, as it was possible that he might make himself understood in that language.

"Who are you, my friends," he demanded, "and what does this mean?"

Somewhat to his surprise the old man answered him, as he arose from the ground, in very fair Spanish.

"We have come to meet you, mighty prince," he said, "and to escort you into your town of Orayzon, where all the people will gladly welcome you, and where the Princess Yemalarra is waiting to wed you."

Castarra was quite thrown off his balance by this strange greeting, and for a moment he did not know what to say.

"For whom do you take me?" he ventured to inquire.

"You are Prince Chalco, for whom we have been waiting during many years, and who, as I promised the people, would surely arrive to-day."

"Our king died a long time ago," continued the old man. "He left one child, the Princess Yemalarra, who cannot rule over us until she marries, and who can marry no one but Prince Chalco, who was stolen from us when he was a child."

"I have predicted his return, and at last I told the people that he would arrive to-day. I told them that he would come from the south, that he would come out of that canyon, that he would be clothed in a strange dress, that he would be accompanied by strange people, and that he would speak a language which I only could understand."

"You see that we had waited for you, and that we were ready to come out and meet you."

"Do you believe, then, that your prediction has come true?" demanded Castarra.

"Do I not see it? The people all believe it. You are a dark-haired, handsome young man, just such as I had promised them, and you have come in the promised time and in the promised way."

"Are you sure that I am the man for whom you were looking?"

"Quite sure. There can be no doubt of that. You are Prince Chalco, and we welcome you most joyfully."

"These people are my friends. Will you welcome them also?"

"Your friends are our friends. They shall be as welcome as you are. You have but to command, and we are all ready to obey you."

"Who are you, old man?"

"I am Zenonyo, the great priest of the people of Orayzon, and the guardian of Princess Yemalarra. Let us hasten, for she is impatient to see you."

"I must first speak to my friends."

Castarra turned back to his companions, who were waiting in wonderment, anxious to learn the meaning of the somewhat lengthy interview.

He explained to them the position of affairs, as well as the bewildered state of his mind would allow him to do so.

"Either this old man mistakes me for some other person," he said, "or he is swindling the people of that town on the rock, though it is possible that he may intend to swindle us. In any event, I suppose we must obey his orders, or he may use force."

"I wish I'd been the chap he was lookin' fur," remarked Perry Wessel.

"The old man and his people seem to mean well by us," said Clara.

"But he tells me that a princess is waiting to marry me," observed Castarra. "What do you say to that?"

"I don't know what to say or what to think. It is all wonderful and incomprehensible to me. But we are in the hands of Providence, and you must use your own judgment as concerns yourself."

"I have no idea of marrying his princess, I assure you," replied Castarra. "I hope to avert that evil, at least. But it seems to me

that for your sake, and for the sake of us all, we must allow this farce to go on, though I cannot pretend to guess how it will end. I will play my part as well as I can, and, as you say, we are in the hands of Providence."

The Ford brothers were of the opinion that they could do nothing but go forward and follow the strange adventure to the end.

Ida Russell declared that the way had been pointed out for them, and they must walk in it. Castarra returned to the priest.

"Lead on, old man," he said, "and we will follow you."

Zenonyo spoke to his people in a language which the whites did not understand, and in reply they raised a joyful shout and crowded around the guests.

The priest gave them some instructions, after which they reformed their procession.

First went the long-robed men, then the white people on horseback, and lastly those who seemed to be soldiers and servitors.

In this order they ascended the road that had been cut in the rock, and entered the town at the open gate.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CITY AND THE PALACE.

THE first thing that appealed to the notice of the travelers after they had passed the gate of the town was the substantial and symmetrical manner in which the houses were built, and the extreme neatness that pervaded everything about them.

The streets were narrow, as in the Moqui towns; but there was not the least suggestion of filth or uncleanness anywhere. Everything was as white and shining as if it had been washed and burnished and kept for show.

The houses, like those in the Moqui and Pueblo towns, were mostly of two stories, though some of them had three, and the only entrances were by means of ladders, through holes in the roofs.

Next they were compelled to notice the number of the people and their orderly manners and neatness of appearance.

The streets were crowded with men, women and children, all dressed in robes or tunics of white or blue cotton and woolen goods, and all as bright and trim as if they had just been attired for a gala occasion.

All together they set up a great shout as the procession passed in through the gateway, and then the crowd parted to the right and left, leaving a lane open through the mass.

Then a large litter, covered with white cloth embroidered with gold and studded with gold ornaments, was brought forward.

Cortez Castarra dismounted, at the request of Zenonyo, and took a seat in the litter, accompanied by the priest.

Similar litters, but less pretentious in style, were provided for the other guests, who were given to understand that they must follow the example set by their leader.

They dismounted and entered the litters, and their horses were taken in charge by the servitors.

As the procession began to move another shout arose from the throats of the multitude, and it was followed by a sort of chant, which was monotonous, but not unpleasing.

This chant was accompanied by the beating of rude wooden drums, and was kept up as long as the procession continued in motion.

The cortege passed through several streets and finally stopped in front of a large and imposing building, which differed from the others in several important particulars, but chiefly in the fact that it was surrounded by a high wall, and that the entrance was through a gateway instead of by a ladder.

From the gateway a flight of steps led up to a vestibule, which had some appearance of architectural beauty, the stones of which it was composed being smoothed and polished until they looked like some coarse variety of marble.

The litters were set down at the foot of the steps, and the guests were led up to the vestibule, while all the people fell back, except the long-robed gentry, who only, as it seemed, were permitted to enter that sacred building.

The white people could only conclude that this edifice was nothing less than a temple or a palace.

As the gates were closed on the procession another shout went up from the populace, and the priest, bowing low before Castarra and his friends, invited them to enter.

The Mexican, who had been looking eagerly about at every step, expecting to see the princess, who was said to be anxiously awaiting his arrival, cast a glance forward as he entered the building, but saw only a long and dimly-lighted hall, at the further end of which was a raised platform, with two seats upon it, richly gilt, and covered with fine furs.

To all the whites the situation was one of overpowering interest, from its novelty and its bearing upon their fate; but to Cortez Castarra it may well be supposed that the interest was so absorbing as to be almost painful.

He had not outgrown the romance of his youth, nor was he destitute of the superstitions of his race.

He found himself the central figure of a drama in which the fate of his friends was mingled inextricably with his own.

He had been chosen out of them all, in some inscrutable manner, to fulfill a destiny by which theirs was to be affected.

And he was expected to marry a princess of these people among whom he had been thrown.

She had been looking for him during a long time, and was even then anxiously awaiting his arrival.

He was eager to see her—not that he had any thought of marrying her, though he could not guess how he was to get out of the scrape.

He did not waver in his allegiance to the fair Ohio girl, in search of whom he had left his Southern home.

But he could not help feeling an interest in this Indian princess, who was said to have been destined for him by the fates, and he was naturally anxious to see her.

His anxiety showed itself in his looks and in his actions; but the others betrayed no such feeling.

Clara and Ida trod the pavement floor like queens, their countenances as trustful and hopeful as if they believed all this hospitality to be as real as it seemed.

Frank and Harry Ford walked with them, watching over them as if no thought but that of solicitude for their fair charges could enter their minds.

Perry Wessel alone cast suspicious glances about him, and looked like a cat in a strange garret.

Cortez Castarra was taken through a passage to the right, after instructing his friends under the directions of Zenonyo, to follow the attendants, who were ready to wait upon them, and who led them by a flight of steps to apartments on the upper floor of the building.

The Mexican followed the priest into a dimly-lighted chamber which had evidently been prepared for his reception, as a bath was in readiness there, together with a profusion of articles which were doubtless intended for toilet purposes.

"Here are some garments that are suited to your position, and you can select such as you wish to wear," said the priest, as he pointed to a pile of clothing that lay upon a couch.

"I go to prepare the princess to receive you. When you shall have made yourself ready, I will come and bring you to her."

Zenonyo bowed low and left the room, and Castarra hastened to enjoy the luxury of his bath and to make his toilet.

Of course he could take no interest in this nearly barbarous woman, this dark-skinned princess of a desert tribe, and yet it was with a feverish impatience that he longed to see her.

She was coarse and ugly, no doubt; but he was anxious to know what she really did look like.

She was old, perhaps, and soured in temper and perverse in disposition; but her fate was linked with his to a certain extent, and he did not try to keep his thoughts from dwelling upon her.

His heart was completely in the possession of the bright-eyed American up-stairs, and yet he trembled in his eagerness to become acquainted with the unknown to whom he had been so strangely brought.

He was ready to swear that all this was nothing but curiosity, a natural result of the peculiar and romantic circumstances that surrounded him.

Lately environed by perils, he had escaped as if by a miracle, and had slipped out of the hands of deadly enemies, to be welcomed by friends who were ready to shower upon him all the blessings in their possession.

To crown it all, he was to be brought into the presence of a princess—none the less a princess because her principality was small and her people were ignorant—who had been long waiting for him as the husband who had been promised to her.

To say the least of it, his appearance there at that time was a remarkable coincidence.

There was a chance, to be sure, that all this was a snare and a delusion; that the stories were true which he had heard concerning human sacrifices among those inaccessible tribes; that the priest had only been using his arts upon Castarra and his companions, to entice them into the town and prepare them for slaughter.

But why should he use stratagem, when he had plenty of force to accomplish his object?

And why should he keep up the fiction when he had got his victims completely in his power?

Castarra was almost forced into the belief that the priest was insane, that these proceedings were all in good faith, and that Zenonyo and the people of Orayzon were deluded, if there was any delusion about the matter.

But he could not be sure of this, and his anxiety made him all the more impatient to see the princess Yemalarra and gain an insight into the probable issue of events.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SUN PRINCESS.

It was not strange that Castarra paid particular attention to his personal appearance, and

that he carefully looked over the garments that had been pointed out by Zenonyo, to see if there were any that suited his fancy.

But he preferred his own picturesque attire to the apparel of the people of Orayzon, and selected only one garment—a long white robe, woven of the finest lambs' wool, and richly embroidered with gold.

This he put on over his own clothes, which he had cleaned and brightened as well as he could, and then he was sure that he made a presentable appearance, though he had no mirror in which to view the effect.

When he had finished his toilet he had no time for further reflection, as the priest came to summon him to the presence of the princess, Yemalarra.

Without a word, and burning with eagerness to solve the question that had agitated his mind, he followed his conductor into the large hall which seemed to be in the center of the building, and through a curtained doorway into a smaller apartment, filled with articles of luxury which he would not have supposed could be found in that country and among that isolated people.

The furniture was of peculiar construction, and mostly uncouth and clumsy; but it gave evidence of some skill in the arts, while it was covered with a superfluity of gilding and other ornamentation, which spoke of an attempt at barbaric splendor.

From this room Zenonyo led the Mexican through another curtained doorway into a larger apartment, which was entirely shut in on all sides, but was well lighted from the top.

Here another and a greater surprise awaited him, in the unexpected beauty of his surroundings.

The floor and walls of this apartment were highly polished, shining like marble, and in the center was a small fountain surrounded by flowers.

There were also several miniature hanging gardens, suspended from light pillars and filled with plants, whose bright blooms loaded the air with fragrance.

Among these were scattered cages of birds, some chosen for their beautiful plumage and others for the sweet notes which they poured forth in floods of melody.

Here and there about the apartment couches were distributed, covered with skillfully-dressed skins of fur-bearing animals or with white or colored robes of native manufacture.

"This is Paradise!" exclaimed Castarra, as he stepped into the apartment and drank in the beauty of the quiet scene.

Zenonyo looked at him as if he did not understand the meaning of the exclamation, and signed to him to seat himself on one of the couches.

The priest then withdrew into a curtained recess, and soon appeared again, leading by the hand—

Could that be the princess?

Or was it a fairy out of a world of imagination?

Cortez Castarra was struck dumb with amazement.

It had remained for this lovely being to put the cap sheaf on the wonders he had witnessed since he emerged from the narrow canyon.

Her features and her skin were evidence of her Indian origin; but her complexion was hardly darker than a rich olive, tinged with pink as a blush mantled her cheeks when she entered the room.

Her eyes were large and dark, her lips were rich and red, and her hair, black and wavy, was banded in luxuriant masses in a strange but becoming style, caught up here and there with knots of flowers.

Her robes were of the finest web of the native looms, heavily embroidered with gold, and set off to advantage by buds and bunches of pink blossoms.

The Mexican could hardly believe his eyes when this queenly creature, as lovely as the houris of a Mohammedan paradise, sailed rather than walked into the apartment.

His mind was in such a maze that he doubted whether he was asleep or awake.

His amazement was at its height when she approached him with downcast eyes and a modest drooping of the head, and addressed him in very fair Spanish.

"Prince Chalco is welcome," she said. "We have waited for him a long time, and we are glad that he has come at last."

"Is it possible," exclaimed Castarra, "that you speak a language which I can understand?"

"Zenonyo taught it to me," she answered, in tones that thrilled her listener like a master-touch upon a harp.

"He said that when you came you would speak a language of which I knew nothing, and I made him teach it to me, because I was sure that I would not be satisfied unless you could tell me your thoughts and understand mine."

"I am glad that he taught you that language," exclaimed Castarra.

"Are you satisfied with me?" she bashfully asked, "now that you have seen me?"

"Satisfied, beautiful Yemalarra? How could any man help being more than satisfied? I beg

that you will be seated and let me hear the sweet tones of your voice again."

She complied with his request, smiling as if well pleased at being addressed in the language of compliment.

"Where have you been during all these years, and what has brought you back here at last?" she gently inquired.

This was a hard question for Castarra to answer, and it is to be feared that he made bungling work of his attempt to answer it.

It seemed to him, just at that moment, that he had been everywhere but where he should have been, and that it must be a special providence that had finally brought him there.

With the large and eloquent eyes of that beautiful girl upon him, and her rich voice charming his senses, it is no wonder that the rest of the world faded away from him, with all his past, and that nothing was real but the scene of enchantment in which he then lived and breathed.

He began to question whether he was not really the expected Prince Chalco, who had been stolen from that city when a child, and who had returned to his own after years of wandering.

It was true that he remembered well his father and mother, that he had not forgotten his grandparents, and that his country was known to him.

But all that was fading from him like a dream from which he seemed to have just awaked.

He answered Yemalarra's questions as well as he could, and spoke to her rapidly and earnestly, but hardly knowing what he said, until an end was put to the interview by Zenonyo.

The princess, after a farewell glance which expressed far more than words had told, withdrew by way of the curtained recess.

Castarra then passively suffered himself to be led away by the priest to another apartment, where food and drink were brought to him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CAPTURE OF CLARA.

THE rest of the white people had been taken up to the second floor of the palace, where the two girls were shown into one apartment, and the three men into another.

In those apartments they found water ready for them, with such articles as they needed for cleansing and refreshing themselves after their long journey and their many labors and fatigues.

For all this they were duly thankful, and also for the rest which those cool apartments afforded them, and which was a great blessing to their wearied frames and excited minds.

Ablutions and refreshments were the first things in order in both apartments.

Then Clara and Ida, who were now willing to trust in Providence and fear nothing, laid down upon a couch that invited them to slumber, and slept soundly in each other's arms.

Frank Ford and Harry, who no longer entertained any apprehensions of danger, and who were glad to be permitted to forget pain and trouble for awhile, also laid down to peaceful slumber, and probably to pleasant dreams.

Perry Wessel, however, who "had his doubts," and who strongly suspected that his party had been ensnared and captured for some sinister purpose, had no idea of losing his senses in sleep, but declared that he would stay awake and "watch the ways of the heathen riptyles."

Not content with watching, as there seemed to be nothing to watch, he finally concluded that he would go out and spy around, feeling that he ought to leave nothing untried by which he might unmask the intentions of those who held himself and his companions in what seemed to be a friendly captivity.

It was easy enough to pass out of the apartment, as the doorway was only closed by a curtain; but the spy had proceeded but a few steps on his tour of investigation, when he was met and halted by an Indian, who wore a short tunic and carried a spear.

This individual presented his weapon with a threatening gesture, giving the investigator to understand that he must proceed no further in that direction.

"Why, you poor coot!" exclaimed Perry. "What on airth do you think you could do with that toad-sticker? I reckon I could clean you out and not half try."

Not understanding the plainsman's words, but perceiving from his looks that he was disposed to be belligerent, the sentry rapped on the stone floor with the butt of his spear, and a number of soldiers came to his assistance.

They speedily convinced Wessel that his investigations must cease.

Then he sought information by attempting to converse with them in the sign language which was so universally understood among the Indian tribes.

He succeeded in making them comprehend him to a certain extent, and in extracting some meaning from the many gestures with which they answered him.

"I take it that we're to go down below arter awhile," he muttered, "when thar's to be grand doin's and a big feast. I jest hope that we white folks ain't to be sarved up fur a roast."

Hello! what's a-comin' now? Looks as if the feast was here a'ready."

This remark was called forth by the appearance of a procession of white-robed people, bearing large wooden platters of food.

As Wessel was ravenously hungry, he gladly followed them into the room which he had just left.

The repast that was brought in was a good one, consisting of goats' flesh, coon cakes, plantains, melons and guavas, with water and fresh milk.

The girls came into the apartment which the men occupied, and all ate as heartily as if they had not enjoyed a "square meal" in a long time.

When they had finished, the remains were cleared away by the long-robed men, and Zenonyo came in to invite the party to proceed to the large hall on the lower floor.

He was endeavoring to give expression to this invitation by means of signs, when Frank Ford interrupted him with the statement that he could speak Spanish.

This simplified matters considerably, and the priest went on to explain that there was to be a grand gathering of the people of Orayzon, at which Prince Chalco and Princess Yemalarra were to be seated on their thrones and presented to the admiring gaze of their subjects.

"How is Prince Chalco pleased with his promised bride?" Frank Ford ventured to ask.

"Excellently well," answered the priest. "She is so beautiful. How could he help it? There is none like her."

"Is she as well pleased with him?"

"Certainly. She is overjoyed. He was destined for her, and he is all she could wish him to be."

"He intends to marry her, then?"

"Certainly. Why not? That was settled long ago, and you should see how happy he is with her."

"When will the marriage take place?"

"The time is not yet decided upon. Whenever the princess is ready."

"When will we be able to see him and speak to him?"

"After this day. There are some ceremonies that must first be gone through with."

Frank translated and reported to his companions what had been said, and in so doing he cast significant glances at Clara Carron; but she did not appear to notice them.

Zenonyo then requested the party to accompany him, as everything was in readiness for the presentation.

The guests followed him to the hall below, which they found crowded with an orderly congregation of neatly dressed men.

There they were shown to seats from which they could view the people and the entire proceedings.

The thrones upon the raised platform were as yet vacant; but soon there came a strange outburst of melody, like the singing of a thousand birds.

At the sound a procession of white-robed men slowly moved in through a side entrance, and in the midst of the procession was Cortez Castarra and the princess.

They took their seats on the thrones, at each side of which the long-robed men stationed themselves, and from the audience burst forth a joyful shout of welcome.

Castarra's white friends, and especially Clara and Ida, looked eagerly at the Princess Yemalarra.

Their surprise was only equaled by their admiration, when they had fully taken in the details of her beauty.

She was so queenly, and at the same time so modest, that they had absolutely no fault to find with her, and could only whisper their ejaculations of wonder and satisfaction.

As for the young Mexican, he seemed to move and act like a man in a dream.

He hardly noticed his friends, but appeared to be looking through the eyes of his mind at something that was visible to himself alone.

Once his glance fell on Clara, and a burning flush overspread his face; but he quickly turned his eyes in another direction.

As he did so his gaze rested on Yemalarra, and there it became fixed.

The reception, if such it might be called, lasted but a short time.

Zenonyo made a speech to the people in their own language, which was frequently interrupted by applause.

At its close Cortez and Yemalarra stood up and bowed, and the throng greeted them with a great shout of joy.

Then the procession was formed as before, and it left the hall by the entrance at which it had come in.

The crowd dispersed, and the white people, in charge of some of the long-robed men, were taken to the upper floor, where a position was shown to them from which they might see the games and festivities in the streets.

After viewing the strange sights and listening to the strange sounds below them, until the gambols of the people of Orayzon became tiresome, Frank Ford and Clara Carron strayed off together, and finally ensconced themselves in a

quiet recess, where they could talk without being observed.

Their conversation naturally touched upon the strange events through which they had passed, and the wonderful scenes which they had lately witnessed.

"Was she not beautiful?" asked Clara, referring to Yemalarra.

"Very beautiful, for that style of beauty," answered Frank, with a significant glance at Clara, as if her style of beauty was the only style he could admire.

"And Senor Castarra played the part of Prince Chalco admirably. He seemed to be a different man from the one we have lately known. Do you think he can have fallen in love with the Indian princess?"

"Why not? as the old priest would say. Zenonyo told us that he was satisfied with her, and there can be no doubt that she is deeply in love with him."

"You questioned the priest very closely on that point," suggested Clara, "as if you felt a great interest in it."

"I did feel an interest in it, not only for the sake of you and the others, but more particularly and most selfishly for my own sake."

She must have known what was coming then; but she made no effort to avoid it.

"Clara, you can not have been blind to the fact that I love you. I have loved you since I knew you in Ohio, and your image has never been absent from my mind. I was in search of you when I met you and Ida, and since then I have endeavored to prove my love, and have waited for an opportunity to declare it."

Though she was silent, there was something in her silence that encouraged him to go on.

"I soon perceived that I had a rival; that Senor Castarra's feelings toward you were those of very warm friendship, if not of love. He was such a gentleman in mind and manner, a man of such a true and noble heart, that it was impossible for me to do or say anything that would look like unfairness toward him, and I decided that I would try not to speak, until your perils should be passed, and you should be in a position to choose freely between us."

"Your sentiments are exactly those which Senor Castarra has already expressed to me on his part," remarked Clara.

"Indeed! But I cannot doubt it, as he is a man of such perfect truth and honor. You will now understand why I hoped that he might have fallen in love with the Indian princess, though it seems impossible that a man could look upon another woman after having seen you."

"That is an extravagant compliment," she protested.

"But it comes from my heart. Having seen what I have seen, and having heard what I have heard, I feel that I have at least the right to tell you that I love you, though I can not hope that you will speak a word in my favor as yet."

Clara's appearance had changed suddenly as he spoke.

A deep color had mounted to her cheeks, her eyes were cast down, and she was nervously picking at the folds of her dress.

"Why not, Frank?" she answered, without looking up, and hardly speaking above her breath.

"Why not?" he replied. "You are not yet safe, Clara. We are not clear of all our troubles. It would be worth more than life to me if I might be permitted to hope that you may return my love at some time in the future; but you are not free now."

"I never shall be," she said softly.

"Never free? What do you mean by that, Clara?"

"I mean to say that I never will be free of you if you really love me, for I have loved you long, Frank, and I can never love any but you."

She gave him her hand, and he seized it and covered it with kisses.

"I respect Senor Castarra very highly," she said. "More than that, I admire him. As you say, he is a gentleman and he has a true and noble heart. But I love you, Frank, and you only."

There was a quick step near them.

The lovers looked up and saw Cortez Castarra standing before them.

CHAPTER XLIV. THE PRIEST'S STORY.

WHEN Castarra had left the great hall with the procession of priests, he was not permitted to have another interview with the princess, who was led away to her own apartments.

He was not sorry for this, as he wished to be alone, or at least to have a private talk with Zenonyo.

The more he thought about the matter, the more he was convinced that he ought not to delay coming to a distinct understanding with the priest.

It was true that his head was in a whirl, that he was intoxicated by the beauty of Yemalarra, that he felt himself entangled in a bewildering maze of circumstances; but this condition of affairs rendered it all the more necessary that he should know exactly where he stood, and

Zenonyo was the only person who could give him the information he required.

To his great gratification, the priest accompanied him to his apartment.

The Mexican seated himself upon a couch, and requested his companion to do likewise.

"I am glad that you have come in here," he said, "as I wished to talk to you. I have some questions to ask you."

"Questions of what kind?" inquired the priest.

"Concerning myself and some other matters."

"You may ask freely, my son; whatever questions you wish to put to me, and I promise you that I will answer them truly."

"The truth is what I want—the exact truth, and nothing else. In the first place, are you an Indian?"

"I am. I was born here in Orayzon, and have never been elsewhere."

"How came you, then, to know my language so well?"

"There was a stray white man, one of your race, who was found by some of our people and brought to Orayzon. He taught me his language and I have taught it to no person but Yemalarra. We gave him a wife, and he remained with us until he died. He left a boy, who was afterward lost and was supposed to have been stolen. We called the boy Prince Chalco."

"And I am supposed to be the son of that white man?"

"Yes; you are supposed to be Prince Chalco."

"But the fact is that I am no such person."

"I presume so. Why should you be? Prince Chalco is dead, no doubt."

"Why, then, have you invented that tale to deceive the people and the princess?"

"I will tell you," calmly replied the priest.

"I promised to give you the truth, and I mean to do so."

"I had come here with the intention of explaining everything to you, before you began to ask me these questions, as it is to my interest, as well as to yours, that you should know the exact truth."

"I must first inform you that the white man of whom I have spoken was very wise."

"He taught me many valuable matters besides his language."

"From him I learned to gain power over the people by predicting many events that afterward came to pass, and by doing many things that were wonderful to them."

"After his death, no longer having his assistance, I lost much of the power that I had gained."

"When Yemalarra's father was dead, and Prince Chalco was lost, the people were greatly troubled, because her father had decreed that she should marry Chalco, and they could have no ruler until she should marry."

"About that time I began to keep up their spirits by predicting that Prince Chalco would return and marry Yemalarra."

"The years rolled on, and there was no sign of his return, and the princess became old enough to marry, and the people grew very uneasy."

"I was obliged to continue my predictions, but nothing came of them, and the people were clamorous, demanding to be told the exact time when the prince would arrive."

"At last I made another prediction, desperately and at random, and promised them that they should surely see him during this moon."

"But I was in trouble; for I had made a false prediction, and the people would soon learn how I had deceived them, and I would suffer not only death, but the most horrible of deaths."

"I could only wish that I might die before the end of the moon; but it is nearly ended, as you see, and I am not dead."

"Last night my trouble was so great that I left the city and wandered forth upon the plain alone."

"I was determined to do something to escape the fate that surely awaited me—to kill myself, or to fly far from Orayzon."

"Finally I wandered into the canyon yonder, which has no outlet as our people believe, and there I came upon you and your friends, who were sleeping quietly in your camp."

"I observed you in particular, and perceived that you closely answered the description which I had given of Prince Chalco."

"Then I hastened back, and entered the city as secretly as I had left it."

"In the morning I called the people together at the temple, and told them that I had had a vision which had come to me out of the sun."

"I then predicted that you and your friends would come out of the canyon in the morning, and directed them to make ready to receive you."

"You have come, and your appearance and that of your friends is such as I described to the people of Orayzon."

"They believe that you are Prince Chalco, and the princess believes it, and why should you not be Prince Chalco?"

CHAPTER XLV.

CASTARRA'S DECISION.

CORTEZ CASTARRA was so astounded by this

plain narrative of fraud and falsehood that for a while he could say nothing.

The cool and calm manner in which the priest proposed to him that he should go on and play his part in the drama of deception was also very irritating to a man of truth and honor.

"If I had not come," he suggested, "the people would have discovered your trickery, and would have put you to death."

"There can be no doubt of that," answered Zenonyo, as if it were such a mere matter of course that it was not worth mentioning.

"If they should now learn that I am not Prince Chalco, that this is an imposition which you have put upon them, they would then kill you."

"My death would be the most horrible that you can conceive."

"What is to prevent me then from denying that I am Prince Chalco, from exposing the fraud that you have practiced, and from going my way with my friends?"

"You could not talk to the people. You do not know their language, and they do not understand yours."

"I could talk to the princess," replied Castarra. "She would understand me."

"But she would not believe you, nor would the people if they could be made to understand you. All my predictions heretofore have proved true, and none has been so wonderful or so exactly fulfilled as this has been. Even if you should succeed in convincing them that I have deceived them, I would not be the only one to suffer. Your death might not be as terrible as mine, but you would surely die."

"I am not to be frightened in that way," answered the Mexican, as he drew himself up proudly. "I have faced death too often, and in too many forms, to fear it now."

"There would be other deaths besides yours and mine," resumed Zenonyo. "Your friends would also die. If there should be among them one who is dearer to you than all the others, her death would be the most horrible of all."

The wily priest had touched a tender chord.

It was not for nothing that he had lived a life of deception, which had compelled him to train all his senses to close observation.

Castarra shuddered visibly, and his head fell upon his breast, as he thought of the tortures that Clara might suffer at the hands of those disappointed and revengeful people.

Was it not his duty to sacrifice himself for her? Would it really be a sacrifice, after all?

"Yemalarra loves you," continued the priest, skillfully presenting the other and more attractive side of the case.

"She has been brought up in the belief that she could marry none but Prince Chalco, and that he would surely appear and claim her as his bride. She has seen you, after anxiously expecting you for so long a time. She believes that you are Prince Chalco. She loves you wildly and passionately. Do you not know it?"

"It seems to be true," assented Castarra.

"What, then, would be the feelings of such a woman, if she should discover that she has been deceived, that the man she loves desires to desert her for a rival, and that both he and the favored rival are in her power for life or death?"

As Castarra thought of that beautiful creature, as soft and smooth and supple as a tiger, but with a tiger's heart and untamed passions, it was natural for him to feel that she might, indeed, take a tigerish revenge upon a rival in her hands, if her love should be spurned.

"But it is useless to talk of that," said the priest. "You could not persuade her or any of her people that you are not what I have represented you to be, and you must continue to be Prince Chalco."

"It seems so," assented the Mexican.

"Why should you not? The princess loves you, and you would be less than a man if you could refuse such love as hers. It would kill her, and you would gain nothing by the refusal. Remain with us and be happy."

"If I decide to remain, will my friends be allowed to go free?"

"Yes. Your word will then be law here, and everything that we can do shall be done to help them. They may go as soon as they wish to, and they shall have a guide to take them out of this country."

"May I see them before I give you a final answer?"

"You may see them as soon as you wish to. Come with me, and I will show you where to find them."

Castarra followed the priest up to the second floor of the building, and there Zenonyo pointed out the apartments in which the white people were established.

"Go and speak to them," he said, "and you shall not be interrupted. You are free here, and may return to me when you choose to do so."

As Castarra was passing a recess in the wall, the sound of voices caused him to stop immediately.

The voices were those of Clara Carron and Frank Ford, and he heard these words from the lips of Clara:

"I have loved you long, Frank, and I can never love any but you."

For a few moments the Mexican was incapable of any action, and it was only as a confused murmur that he heard the words that followed.

Then his senses came to him, and his resolution was taken.

Fearful of being considered an eavesdropper, he stepped forward and stood before the astonished couple.

Clara was covered with blushes, and Frank had a shame-faced look; but Castarra quickly reassured them both by smiling and extending a hand to each.

"I was not listening to you," he said; "but I have heard a few words and am glad that I heard them. I trust that you may be happy, as I have no doubt you will be, and no effort of mine will be lacking to promote your happiness."

Frank, who had risen to his feet, bowed low in recognition of his friend's magnanimity.

"You are better suited to her, Mr. Ford," continued Castarra, "than I am, and you deserve her. I desire her happiness above all things, and she would not have been happy with me. I was looking for you and the others, to explain to you the position of affairs here; but I may now leave unsaid much that I had meant to say."

"But what is the position of affairs?" demanded Frank.

"You are free to return to your own country, and I am to remain here. That is all."

"Could you go with us if you wished to?" asked Clara.

"I must frankly say that I could not. The old priest has practiced a fraud upon these people, and I am the instrument of his deception. If I should expose it, and should refuse to remain, we would all lose our lives or be held as prisoners. If I play the part that has been laid down for me, you are free to go, when and where you please."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Clara. "You have a noble heart, Senor Castarra; but we can not allow you to sacrifice yourself for us."

"Is it a sacrifice? I had but one friend, Pedrillo Mocco, who was my comrade and more than a brother to me. He is dead, and I have no desire to return to my own people."

"You are to marry the princess, and she is beautiful," suggested Frank.

"That is the plan. She is beautiful, as you say, and I believe that she loves me. Why should I not be happy here? But we have said enough about it. Let the others know that the matter is settled. I will go and tell the priest that I have decided to remain, and he will make arrangements for your departure, whenever you wish to leave."

The Mexican hastened to his own apartment, where he found Zenonyo waiting for him.

Even the priest's impassive countenance could not help expressing the anxiety with which he awaited the answer of his guest.

"I have decided to remain," said Castarra. "I am Prince Chalco, and Yemalarra is to be my bride."

"It is well, my son. Come to Yemalarra. You will be as welcome to her as sunlight to the flower."

CHAPTER XLVI. CONCLUSION.

THE next morning Cortez Castarra saw his friends again, and told them that a guide had been secured, and all requisite arrangements had been made for their immediate departure.

In accordance with their request he took them to Yemalarra, who was highly pleased with the interview, and who gave Clara and Ida some presents that were curious and beautiful.

But he was impatient for them to be gone.

Her eyes were as sharp in their way as those of the priest, and there had been glances and circumstances upon which she was liable to put her own interpretation.

She could not believe that her long-expected Prince Chalco was wholly her own, until his white friends were away.

So their horses were brought to the gate of the temple, bags of provisions and sacks of water were given to them and they mounted and rode away, accompanied by an Indian guide on Castarra's horse.

When they reached the plain they turned to take a last look at the town, and saw Cortez and Yemalarra standing on the flat roof of a house.

She was clinging to him lovingly, and he was waving an adieu to his friends, which they answered in the same fashion.

They seemed to be leaving him in happiness; but he had been such a close friend to them all, and had proved his truth and chivalry in so many and such great perils, that Clara and Ida could not refrain from shedding tears as they looked their last upon him, and their lovers were also deeply affected.

Perry Wessel could hardly believe in their good fortune in being allowed to leave the town and people of Orayzon, until they were far out of sight of the "city on a hill."

Even then he had his doubts, and watched the guide suspiciously, as if fearful that treachery might yet be intended.

But the guide was true, and he safely led the party across the Sierra Madre, where he left them and returned to his own people.

Once in the valley of the Rio Grande it was an easy matter to reach Santa Fe, where Perry Wessel was well rewarded for his services, and where the others remained a while to recover from their fatigue.

When their adventures became known there, inquiry was made for Cortez Castarra, which Frank Ford answered by telling how and where they had left him.

There were many who grieved at his disappearance, and some of his old comrades proposed to get up an expedition and go to visit him in his isolated principality; but this intention was never carried into effect.

At Santa Fe, Frank Ford and Clara Carron crowned the romance of their lives—or ended it, as some may think—by marriage, so that they might travel thereafter as man and wife.

Their example was followed by Harry Ford and Ida Russell, and the two couples set out, with a sufficient escort, on their way to California.

They reached the land of gold after a safe and not unpleasant journey, and proceeded to San Francisco, where Clara and her husband put themselves in communication with Emilio Tessier, the lawyer who had charge of the estate of the deceased widow De Lerdo.

That gentleman was greatly surprised at seeing the heiress arrive without the escort of Francisco de Lerdo.

His surprise was turned to grief when he learned of the adventures of that young man and his violent death at the hands of the Apaches.

The lawyer had really felt a strong affection for Francisco, whom he believed to have been ill-treated, and he had meant no harm to him or any other person by sending him to seek his fortune in what might be supposed to be the easiest way to gain it.

It was, therefore, a sad shock to him to learn that he had sent young De Lerdo to his death.

But he said nothing about his actions or his motives to Clara and her husband.

As they seemed to have received no information on that subject, it was as well to let them remain in ignorance.

Clara had no difficulty in proving her identity, and she soon entered into possession of the large property that had been bequeathed to her by her aunt.

When this business was settled she purchased an estate in the country, where she resided with her husband, and nothing was wanting to complete their happiness.

Harry Ford and Ida remained with them until they received intelligence of important silver discoveries in Utah, and of the fact that the irrepressible miners were flocking into that hitherto closed territory and taking possession of the mining-region.

Then Harry followed in the wake of discovery, carrying with him Gideon Gray's description of the claim he had found, and its location.

He soon learned that the claim covered what was believed to be one of the best leads in the Little Cottonwood district, and that there were many who were anxious to purchase it.

Instead of selling out, he formed a company to work the mine, in which his brother and himself were largely interested, and the enterprise proved to be a great success.

Elder Hynes proved to be one of those who were killed by the explosion at the *casa grande*; but Andrew Carron and the other Mormons had not gone near enough to the ruin to be in danger.

Immediately after that disaster they deserted the remnant of the Apaches, and returned to Utah, where Andrew became permanently connected with the Mormons, and gained a not very enviable notoriety among his chosen people.

Nathan Sollis continued to run his ferry across the Colorado, and in the course of time was surprised by the receipt of some valuable presents, which proved to him that he had not been forgotten by the girl whom he fed and sheltered after her escape from the "Saints."

THE END.

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